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Parliamentary
questions

Role model

Sophie Morgan fights on

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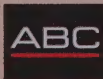
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editorial

Identity crisis point

It now seems clear that the single equalities route to anti-discrimination legislation is the only game in town as far as the government's concerned. They're promising an act by the middle of next year. But where does this leave those at the sharp end? While there's still a school of thought that says that single equalities is fine and dandy in principle, there are those who worry about the timeliness and impact in reality.

“Racism and sexism are thankfully frowned upon whereas prejudice against disabled people is still comparatively rife and often goes unchallenged”

And these are more than just the self-serving arguments of a special interest group hell-bent on preserving hard-won rights and status, because no matter how willing disabled people may be to share common cause with other oppressed, repressed and discriminated-against minorities, there are factors which clearly set us apart from them and justify special pleading.

Apart from the inescapable

challenges which the physical environment can present, there's also the discrimination designed into it by a non-disabled society, its builders, planners and architects. This can cover access and exit barriers, lack of available information and failure to meet a variety of impairment-related needs.

There's also the argument which says that the now disbanded Disability Rights Commission had only just begun the game of catch-up in bringing disabled people more into line with the greater equality achieved by other minority groups. For instance, while racism and sexism may not have been eradicated, they are, thankfully more generally frowned-upon whereas prejudice against disabled people is still comparatively rife and often goes unchallenged.

Then there's the question of identity. The notion of a “disabled” community coalescing out of a whole range and variety of impairment groups is still relatively new. An identity and consciousness born out of commonality of disabling experience is still being formed. Which raises the question: is now the time to subsume that fledgling identity into the broader equalities agenda?

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Sophie Morgan

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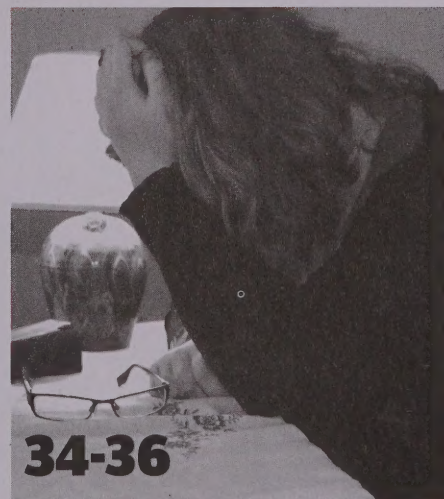
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newsview

Lynch in Sync with struggle

Kelly Mullan

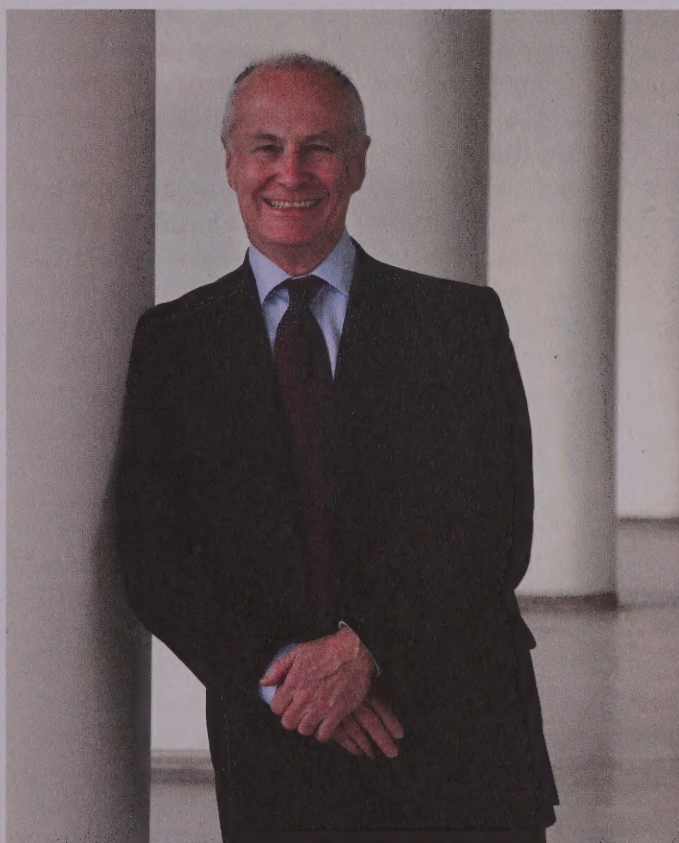
Apart from being Australian and disabled, the unassuming chief executive of London's Southbank Centre says, perhaps tongue in cheek, that he's no different from any of the people with whom he works.

Before joining the Southbank in 2002 and superintending the refurbishment of the Royal Festival Hall, Michael Lynch (pictured, right) was director of the Sydney Opera House.

He says that recognising his impairment has led him to a change in consciousness and a change in his leadership agenda.

Lynch is backing Sync, a new leadership programme exploring ways for disabled people in the arts to break through the glass ceiling bisecting their career ladders. Some of the questions raised by Sync are particularly pertinent to Lynch, such as: "Do disabled leaders need to hide their impairment to be taken seriously?"

He explains how he came to be open about his own impairment: "I've had polio since I was three but I've spent most of my life pretending it wasn't a



MORLEY VON STERNBERG

problem. I was overcompensating to show I could do anything anyone else could do. But as my body became more frail, physically, to do my job was getting harder.

"A few years ago, when I was working at the Sydney Opera House – one of the least disability-friendly buildings at that time – I started using a cane. So in the last few years I've become more aware of the difficulties people face negotiating public buildings." As a result, he is very

conscious of access needs.

Sync wants to find out how the agendas of disabled arts leaders are shaped by their experiences of exclusion and involvement. Lynch, for his part, believes that participation in cultural life is a fundamental human right and that arts organisations should be at the forefront of providing opportunities for disabled people.

He says: "Employers have to find ways of creating an even playing field... Some

barriers are obvious but others are more unexpected. Take my colleague Cathy Woolley's experience: the hardest thing for her in terms of being able to move forward as a deaf person in the visual arts is that most of the business is done at opening nights and she is significantly disadvantaged at these huge, loud gatherings. It's the greatest inhibitor to her development and it'll be interesting to see how it can be resolved."

Apart from ensuring the refurbished Royal Festival Hall is fully accessible to all, Lynch says the most powerful thing he can do to promote inclusiveness is to be open about his impairment.

"I noticed as soon as I started using the cane that people did react and respond differently to me but if I'm recognising myself as a disabled person, I think that has an important impact on the people I work with.

"There's been an unnatural interest from photographers in taking photos of me with my cane. But it's probably important for people to see that. You can influence others by being open about yourself."

• www.syncleadership.com

breakingnews

We launch hate report

Disability Now, Scope and the UK's Disabled People's Council have published their report on disability hate crime, *Getting Away with Murder*. Written by *Disability Now*'s news editor, Katharine Quarmby, the 50-page report looks at all aspects of disability hate crime.

It highlights the wide gap between official data on disability hate crime and the results of self-reporting surveys by a growing number of disability organisations; the disparity between sentencing for disability hate crimes and other forms of hate crime; and the language used to describe disabled people ("vulnerable") and the crimes against them ("bullying").

The report also looks at

examples of best practice, often conducted by disabled people locally, to fight disability hate crime; and the progress made at national level to make the criminal justice system more responsive to disabled people.

The report has a long list of recommendations for the government, police, prosecutors and judges, as well as for the media, local authorities, housing officers and social care professionals.

The report has several key calls to action. It calls on the government to commission a review of all violent deaths of disabled people over an agreed time period to see if a disability hate crime offender profile can be constructed. It wants a society-wide discussion of

disablism and why disabled people are often seen as less worthy. It calls for guidance to key practitioners to help them spot early warning signs of a hate crime. Most importantly, it says a discussion is needed about how best to prevent hate crime.

The report will be formally discussed at a series of events in the autumn at which key disability rights activists will be speaking. The report was endorsed by the Crown Prosecution Service, the Trades Union Congress, the Home Office minister Vernon Coaker, the National Disabled Police Association and the Metropolitan Police's Alfred Hitchcock.

Access hopes at Number 10

The government has confirmed that it is considering creating "level access" to No 10 Downing Street – via the front door.

The news has delighted disability campaigners. It comes in response to a petition by disabled people on the Downing Street website.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) confirmed it is considering the option of "level access via the No 10 front door" and that such plans were in the "design development stage".

The PMO acknowledged the "difficulties encountered by disabled users of the building, including wheelchair users", but a spokeswoman was unable to give a timescale for the proposals.

David Burdus, an access consultant who has campaigned on the issue for 13 years, said he was "thrilled to bits and I wish the team that are taking it forward the best of luck". He added: "I hope it gets through the planning process; it is the highest profile front door in the land and sends a powerful message. Could I be the first one to use it?"

Campaigner Rachel Hurst said she was glad that No 10 was taking its disability equality duties seriously.



South African swimmer Natalie Du Toit was chosen to carry her country's flag at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Du Toit made history last month by becoming the first person to qualify for both the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

REUTERS/MIKE BLAKE

Disabled man takes on car insurance giants

Sunil Peck

A disabled motorist says that he will go to court to force insurance companies to change their policies on offering online quotes for adapted vehicles.

Thomas Atkins has just received an out-of-court settlement from Insure and Go which he sued after it twice refused to give him a quote for his adapted vehicle.

He has identified 67 other brokers and companies that he says are discriminating against disabled motorists because they do not offer quotes for vehicles adapted for disability reasons.

He has informed the Equality and Human Rights Commission about 17 of them, all of which have denied him a quote, and he is threatening to take them to court unless they change their policies.

Mr Atkins said: "I am doing this for the benefit of disabled motorists who deserve equality and have to adapt their cars out of necessity. These companies are discriminating against disabled people."

A spokeswoman from the Post Office, one of the companies that Mr Atkins claimed was discriminating against disabled motorists, said that its online system

could give instant quotes for modified vehicles but customers should also talk to a consultant to make sure that they had full cover.

She added that the process involved a short telephone call.

A spokeswoman for OutRight Insurance, another company that Mr Atkins claims has a discriminatory policy, said that it was not company policy to comment on individual cases; but she said that all customers with modified vehicles are referred to an assessment panel.

She added: "The customer is advised that they will receive a call on the day they submitted their details or the next working day if the details were submitted after 5pm or on the weekend."

A spokesman from the AA, which Mr Atkins also claims discriminates against disabled motorists, said that the company did not discriminate against disabled motorists and that anyone requesting a quote for an adapted vehicle was required to speak to a member of staff on the telephone.

Mr Atkins said that four out of the 17 companies had been asked if they were prepared to enter into conciliation. Two had

agreed to do so.

Douglas Campbell, chief executive of Mobilise, the disabled motorists' charity, said that if Mr Atkins had been denied a quote because of his impairment rather than because of "underwriting issues", this would be "totally unacceptable and indicates a degree of

laziness on their part".

He added: "It's blatant discrimination in the same way that it would be if they said, 'We're not going to give you a quote because you're black or a woman.'"

The Equality and Human Rights Commission said that it was investigating Mr Atkins' cases but was unable to comment further.



Speedy, a Suffolk tabby cat, has scooped Rescue Cat of the Year at this year's Feline Oscars, organised by the charity Cats Protection. Speedy, pictured here with her owner, Christine Payne, who has learning difficulties and epilepsy, is able to alert others if Christine is about to have a seizure.

UNP

newsroundup

Welsh film rights playground wrongs



Wrong Choice, a short animation film designed to challenge prejudice towards disabled children in the playground, is to screen in cinemas and council offices across Wales. The film is based on an idea contributed by a group of Cardiff school children. The children won a competition run throughout Wales by the Equality and Human Rights Commission's *Croeso* project.

Cautious welcome for benefits reform plans

The welfare secretary, James Purnell, unveiled plans to reform the benefits system, with huge implications for disabled people.

The benefits system will be simplified into two benefits: employment support allowance, to replace incapacity benefit (IB) from October 2008 for new claimants and from 2013 for all claimants; and job seeker's allowance, for those the government deems fit to work. All IB claimants will have to take a work capability assessment from 2009.

Disability groups welcomed some proposals such as extra funding for Access to Work and Workstep and a roll-out

of individual budgets that would allow disabled people to decide what they need to help them go to work.

Other proposals raised concern. In particular, there were worries about Pathways to Work being rolled out before being evaluated and about the right of private and voluntary providers to bid for any "back to work" service being extended.

Liz Sayce, chief executive of RADAR, gave a "cautious welcome" to the green paper. "The broad thrust of these proposals is right but we must ensure that those who most need support to work and develop careers get it; and that the price is not increased poverty for people on IB, who already struggle to get by day to day."

Institutions beckon for spinal patients

People with spinal injuries are being housed unsuitably after discharge from hospital, new research revealed.

Aspire, the spinal injury charity, examined data from three of England's nine specialist spinal injuries hospitals. It found that a quarter of patients were discharged to care homes, hospitals or other institutions.

The charity also claimed that, due to the slow process in getting disabled facilities grants (DFGs), many former patients are unable to get to a bathroom or leave their home.

A Department of Communities and Local Government spokesman

said legislation requires councils to make a decision within six months of receiving a DFG application.

Killer admits guilt

A man who killed a Scottish disabled teenager admitted her murder.

Stuart Jack, 22, pleaded guilty to murdering 19-year-old Laura Milne in December last year, in Aberdeen.

Two of his friends, Debbie Buchan, 19, and Leigh MacKinnon, 18, pleaded guilty to attempted murder, at Edinburgh's High Court.

After killing Miss Milne, Jack and his co-accused attempted to hide her body. Buchan had bullied Miss Milne since they met at school at the age of five.

School should have helped disabled pupil

A Lincolnshire grammar school failed to take steps to help a pupil with autism to sit its 11-plus entrance exam, the local government ombudsman found.

The King's School, in Grantham, said it did not need to make adjustments because the pupil did not have a statement of special educational needs.

But the pupil became so upset during the exam that he could not see the paper. After failing the exam his mother appealed against the school's decision to refuse him a place.

The ombudsman's report found the school had failed to consider its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and relevant codes of practice. It added that an appeal panel hearing had also failed in its duties.

The pupil now attends another grammar school.

The King's School has apologised and agreed to tell the parents of future applicants how to raise potential disability issues. It will also improve the way it deals with future cases.

Director of the Alliance for Inclusive Education, Tara Flood, said the case was an "indictment of the struggle of parents and children to find an education in an inclusive education system".

Lambeth Council forced to backtrack

A council that told a disabled asylum-seeker that he was not entitled to a free travel Freedom Pass was forced to admit it was wrong.

After protests by campaign groups WinVisible and Transport for All and a legal challenge, Lambeth reversed its position and apologised.

Five other disabled asylum-seekers in similar positions were also being issued with passes.

Disabled EU fliers can expect airport help

The UK aviation industry can no longer discriminate against disabled air passengers, a government minister told *Disability Now*.

Transport minister Rosie Winterton was speaking at an event to launch the application in the European Union of anti-discrimination legislation for air travellers.

The legislation covers assisted travel, compensation for damaged mobility equipment and disability equality training for airport and airline staff.

It gives disabled people the right to expect assistance arriving at and departing from airports and getting on and getting off the plane. But captains still have the right to stop disabled passengers boarding on safety grounds.



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Tracey and Purnell (above) were two of the stars of the Family Planning Association's Sexual Health Week 2008. The charity is promoting the rights of people with learning difficulties to enjoy sex and relationships like anybody else. Tracey and Purnell are a real-life couple, recruited through the Stars in the Sky dating agency.

No reprieve for LDAF

Disabled artists saw disaster for disability arts following the demise of the London Disability Arts Forum (LDAF).

The forum was set up in 1986 to develop the work of disabled artists. It published its own magazine, *Art Disability Culture*, and staged the London

International Disability Film Festival. But in December last year, the Arts Council England announced it would not carry on funding LDAF.

Staff tried to find other funding but LDAF went into liquidation and closed at the end of July. Actor and writer Mat Fraser said: "Without an organisation, disability arts will be left to fragment."

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It's eat or heat this winter

Rising energy bills and a steep increase in the cost of living are likely to drive many disabled people into debt this winter, says **Janet Slater** (right)

How far can you stretch a chicken? The answer – given that my weekly income is £65.38 income support and I live in the north of England – is “about four days”: one day hot, second day cold (with left-overs from day one), third day cold (with jacket potatoes), fourth day risotto or soup.

For those fortunate enough never to have heard of the pittance called “income support”, it is given by the government to those with no other income to live on. By “live on”, I mean everything: food, heating, clothing, water, television license, socialising!

No winter fuel payments, though, because I am only disabled, not retired.

I do receive disability living allowance at the middle rate of care and higher rate mobility. The mobility component I use for my Motability car, without which I would be under house arrest. The £44.85 per week care component goes on petrol, telephone, etc. I don't

drink, never buy convenience or junk food, I have not had a night out or holiday in years and possess one pair of shoes (I don't do much walking!). My only vice is rolling my own cigarettes at £10 a week.

Because I single-handedly looked after my disabled son for many years, I have no savings.

Somewhere in the barrage of information about the credit crunch, rising energy bills and cost-of-living increases, you may have heard of those having to choose between “heating and eating” this winter. I am one of them.

Two years ago, winter was just about “do-able”. I survived... just.

But I still have not paid last winter's fuel bills. Letters from the energy company lie in an ever-increasing pile. If the bailiffs come, I own nothing of value. My furniture has come from re-cycling centres or rescued from a rubbish pile.

Running the finances of a country is like running a home. Those who cannot look after themselves take



priority. My dog and three cats are fed and cared for before myself. The living things come before “profits”, “infrastructure” and “investment”.

I have five years before I can get the £250 winter fuel payment and 25 years before I can bask in the £400 given to the over-80s.

I realise a lot of this is a worldwide energy problem. But the whole world does not live in the north of England with our atrocious climate. (What global warming?)

This insulation hoo-ha is

just a red herring. What, have a house full of stale air circulating all winter to keep warm?

Disabled people need cold fuel payments this winter. Not extra jumpers or draught excluders, but real money for real heating.

This winter, my household will eat as well as we possibly can on £65.38. Our wellbeing comes before the profits of the big six energy companies. All my heating bills will be forwarded to 10 Downing Street. Just keep a place for me in the debtors' prison!

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politics

Disability rights - and lefts



With the US presidential elections just two months away, **Dan Lawton** describes how disabled people reacted when the Democratic and Republican parties presented their disability policies

In July, disability activists from across the US gathered in Columbus, Ohio, for the National Seminar on Disability.

The event, organised by the American Association for People with Disabilities (AAPD) and sponsored by more than 70 additional groups, highlighted the issues most important to the disability community in the upcoming election.

It also allotted both presidential candidates – Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama – a chance to present their respective plans to improve disability rights in America.

Mr Obama's transatlantic trip prevented him from attending but his position was taken by Senator Tom Harkin, a leading advisor on disability issues to the Democratic campaign.

Mr Harkin characterised the fight for disability rights as "a moral obligation", while stating Mr Obama's commitment to restoring

the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

A landmark piece of legislation passed in 1990 that prohibits discrimination based on disability, the ADA has been narrowed by recent Supreme Court decisions ruling that individuals who mitigate their disabilities with medication or prosthetics may not be protected.

Mr Harkin also stressed the importance of passing the Community Choice Act, which would let individuals receiving Medicaid (a US government healthcare program) use funds for community-based health-care instead of nursing homes.

Mr McCain, speaking via satellite, emphasised his commitment to providing care to veterans with disabilities.

A decorated war hero who was tortured during his five years in a Vietnam prison camp, Mr McCain harshly



Face-off: John McCain, *left*, and Barack Obama

condemned last year's scandal at Walter Reed Military Hospital – where patient neglect and deplorable conditions were revealed. He also voiced his support for ADA restoration, stating that legislators "must clarify the definition of a disability to assure full protection for those the law is intended to serve".

In spite of Mr Obama's non-appearance, most in attendance favoured his proposals over those of Mr McCain. In fact, Mr McCain's opposition to the Community Choice Act incited boos from the audience, especially after Mr Harkin had argued that the bill could be funded annually for the price of 10

days of war in Iraq.

But the most compelling disparity between the candidates on disability issues may be seen in the most visible of places: their websites.

Mr Obama's has a nine-page comprehensive plan on a variety of disability issues. Mr McCain's contains two paragraphs (on autism only). If such meagre attention is indicative of how his campaign values the disability community – then the 37 million disabled voters in America will have an easy choice in November.

• **The National Forum on Disability** can be viewed at: www.disaboom.com/Community/Organizations/AAPD

mediawatch

Gill's lack of taste

It's not every day a disabled person opens a restaurant that warrants a review in the *Sunday Times*, **writes Ian Macrae.**

So when it happens, you might think the chef would be afforded the same respect from the critic as any other restaurateur might expect.

Ambassade de l'Île is the new London gastronomic home of Jean-Christophe Ansanay-Alex (pictured, right) – JC to his mates and patrons – where he offers his own distinctive take on traditional Lyonnais dishes.

The *Sunday Times* sent A A Gill to review it. Gill

belongs to a coterie of journalists who think they can say what they like – and bugger the consequences.

On this occasion, Gill chose to make fast and loose with the fact that the chef is disabled, having lost the use of his right arm following serious injury in a car crash.

To begin with, he described Jean-Christophe as “the famous one-armed chef” and made reference to his arm being absent from the kitchen. Both statements are false and irrelevant.

Gill went on to say: “He came and asked if everything was all right. You tell



me, I wanted to say. Just imagine how many stars they'd give you if you had double the arms and half the names.”

The one thing a two-

Michelin-starred chef doesn't need or want and shouldn't have to take is the patronising attitude of someone whose palate is clearly already dulled.

Roll up, roll up...

Free speech or hate speech? **Emma Bowler** says some web content smacks of the freakshow



Some internet content comes precariously close to giving offence; some makes no bones about it.

One *Disability Now* reader was horrified at clips on *YouTube* of disabled babies. “No wonder young people grow up to see disabled people as a form of entertainment,” she said, “when *YouTube* performs the same function

as a circus freakshow.”

YouTube's guidelines tell users: “*YouTube* is not a shock site.” It invites free speech but it doesn't permit hate speech: “Speech that attacks or demeans a group based on... disability.”

Yet videos of babies and children with conditions such as Harlequin type ichthyosis, anencephaly and hydrocephalus, all causing major disfigurements, are mocked, laughed at and called vile names. It's all too easy to

find comments after these videos saying, “Just kill it, it's a mutant” – and worse.

Commenting on this, Winnie Coutinho, head of campaigns and communications at Changing Faces, the charity for people with disfigurements, said: “These films are voyeuristic and, in our view, infringe the concept of respect for the basic dignity of an individual; they use words that encourage ridicule and disgust of people with disfigurements and there are possibly issues

around consent from families and individuals whose images are being used in this way on the internet.”

A *YouTube* spokesperson said: “*YouTube* has clear policies that prohibit inappropriate content on the site...When users feel content is inappropriate they can flag it and our staff then review it as quickly as possible to see if it violates our terms of use.”

So the message is: if you see something demeaning, complain.

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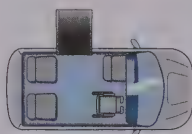
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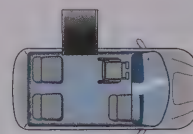
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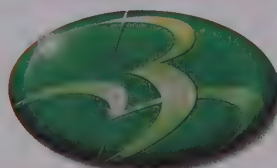
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disabilityrights

Equality in the bedroom

Last month, our *Ask the Experts* pages focussed on a young man who needed assistance to have sex with his girlfriend. Here, our relationships expert, **Simon Parritt**, calls for more to be done to enable disabled people to gain equality of opportunity in the bedroom

comment now

asktheexperts you ask, they answer

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q I am a 21-year-old man with cerebral palsy (cp) and am in a relationship with a young lady who also has cp. We wish to have intercourse but with our disabilities this is impossible to do alone. What are our options? Name and email address supplied

SP: If you wanted assistance to go swimming or to the cinema with your girlfriend, there would be no real issue, other than the practical. But sex involves more than just practical issues, so first consider whether you and your lady friend would be comfortable being assisted by your support workers or personal assistants in such an intimate way. How relaxed would you be asking for such help and how would you raise the issue? The next question is whether the person who supports you is

willing to view your desire to have intercourse as a natural part of their role. Both issues are difficult and complex. They deal with people's feelings and moral attitudes about sexuality as well as society's and the caring professions' views and attitudes towards sexuality and disability. Some support workers feel they would be unsupported by managers or marginalised by colleagues. Obviously, you and your girlfriend shouldn't get too hung up on doing what others do or aim too high

too quickly. Most couples learn what works best by having fun and experimenting. Everyone is different and enjoys sexual intimacy in their own way. Exploring what suits both of you, together, is the first step. Penetrative sex might not turn out to be the best fun, especially if it involves a lot of effort, fatigue and involvement of others. This is something you might want to talk through with someone experienced and open, whom you both trust.



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THE EXPERTS

Having a sexual identity is fundamental to being a complete human being. It is essentially enjoyable and life-affirming and promotes health and wellbeing.

But where do disabled people fit in to this? How far can we act on our choices?

Are those with high support needs able to make the same choices as everyone else? At the point where others just act, a disabled person may need another to act on their behalf, or at least facilitate their decision. Worse still, they may need a committee to allow them to do so.

Even masturbation is

problematic. It is usually a personal and private expression of sexual feelings, but what if my impairment makes this impossible? Whose rights are more important when I ask for assistance? Mine or my PAs? And whose emotional and moral sensitivities? And is masturbation part of personal care?

The rights and equality issues of sexual intimacy with others is even more complex. Some physical impairments can be a real barrier to expressing our sexuality without assistance. Professionals crave rules and guidelines in these situations to make them feel safe, but most organisations avoid addressing these issues out of fear and the risk of public outrage.

Many people find it hard to form healthy and fulfilling sexual relationships, and it is not a human right, per se, to be given the relationship of our choice. What should be a human right is the opportunity to form such relationships. Rights are not about avoiding the consequences of bad decisions, but about equality of opportunity. So do disabled people have equality of opportunity to

this fundamental aspect of human life?

With direct payments and personal budgets, we should be offered more ability to make our own choices. Independent living should not just be about access to work, transport and living in your own place. However, no one wants to address the practicalities when it comes to sexual expression and the use of care assistants and PAs. Agencies supplying staff are unlikely to take a liberal view to clients' sexuality. Social services are even less inclined to take a liberal and rights approach, often hiding behind risk assessments and similar policies. Staff are usually left unsure and unsupported and therefore adopt a "do nothing" position.

If we are ever to be truly equal, these issues must be dealt with head on. Why should some disabled people be left to suffer in silence while the rest of society can act as they choose in private? The policy and law-makers need to ask themselves why they avoid this issue and how they might feel if they needed others to facilitate the expression of their own sexual and relationship choices.

Olympic feast could be sweet or sour

Hosting the Olympics and Paralympics has prompted China to take real steps towards improving the lives of disabled people, but it still has a long way to go in improving its attitude to equality, says **Shi Guangyu***



Xiao Wang is a blind masseur. Every day he commutes across town from his home in the south of Beijing to the massage clinic in the east where he works.

But today he notices something different about his journey: the roads are much less congested than usual but the bus he is on seems a lot more crowded. Today is the first day of Beijing's traffic control strategy, aimed at reducing pollution and improving traffic flow during these two Olympic months.

Xiao Wang's workplace is in the heart of Beijing's

business district and he is expecting the Games to bring him new foreign customers. To meet this demand, Xiao Wang and his fellow blind masseurs have been busy learning English.

Social attitudes are still, at best, patronising and over-protective and there is little real understanding of social equality ☹☹

For ordinary Beijingers, going for a massage at one of the city's "blind massage parlours" is one of the few

opportunities they have to meet disabled people face-to-face.

And the government has recently put a lot of effort into creating jobs for disabled people – a fact it readily advertises.

Yet social attitudes are still, at best, patronising and over-protective and there is little real understanding of social equality and the needs of disabled people.

One example of good intentions gone awry is Beijing's new accessible bus route with low-step buses for wheelchair access. Unfortunately, neither the

public nor disabled people themselves were familiar with the idea of universal access and so the scheme was abandoned days after it opened on the grounds of lack of demand.

Social attitudes and a lack of respect for the needs of disabled people are among the most worrying aspects of the Beijing Olympics.

Queuing for the bus causes Xiao Wang the greatest anxiety. He may be blind but he is young and feels awkward when he's pushed to the front of the queue. Disabled or not, he believes he is a citizen like everyone else and shouldn't be treated differently.

This is a matter of equality, which means accepting people's differences. People should realise that whatever "psychological problems" we might have as disabled people, we are not – in this respect at least – much different from the rest of the population.

The constant emphasis on the "emotional sensitivities of the disabled" reinforces the idea of us as a species apart. All that prescriptive advice given to non-disabled volunteers in

Chinese Paralympic training manuals augments the barriers between disabled people and the rest of society. Everyone should be treated with equal respect and an overbearing, over-protective attitude is not usually very helpful.

Yet when it comes to the Olympics, most Chinese people are genuinely enthusiastic. Our enthusiasm comes from our sense of hospitality, our love of big, noisy events and, perhaps, our deep-seated vanity.

The Olympics are greeted with opposition by very few people in China in the way they have been opposed in London and other cities around the world. Most people here can find their own reasons to support the Games. Whatever anxieties we might have about the



Far left: Beijing's Forbidden City. Below left: a member of China's Paralympic wheelchair basketball team in training. Above: a meeting of blind people in rural north China

inconvenience the Games are causing us, or the cost to the economy, our excitement just now seems to override all other considerations. This is as true for disabled people as for the rest of society.

Beijing is more developed and generally provides better disabled access than most other cities in China. Most residential districts now have wheelchair ramps, pavements have tactile paving for blind people and lifts and accessible toilets have been installed in many public places.

Wherever possible, international standards are

applied – especially at Olympic venues.

But things aren't yet perfect. The newly-opened Line Five underground, for example, still needs improvements to make it fully accessible to wheelchair-users. Access for disabled people is a slow process which involves more than just accessible hardware. What is most needed is a change in mindset.

China is still a developing country and until recently its civil society has been very weak. Holding the Olympics – especially the Paralympics – here is helping to encourage the

growth of civil society.

It is also raising public awareness of disability and inspiring improvements in our living environment.

The Paralympics will leave us with the hope – and the determination – that we can break down social barriers and create a more equal society in the future.

Will the Paralympics really be the sweet course of Beijing's Olympic banquet? We are waiting with bated breath!

• **Shi Guangyu (not his real name) is a disabled activist with a non-governmental organisation and lives in Beijing**



onetowatch



Cereal thriller

Swimmer Sam Hynd is heading to his first Paralympic Games. Sam, 17, is one of ten young elite athletes who have received funding from Kellogg's to provide training. Sam will be contesting the 50m, 100m and 400m freestyle in China, along with the 100m breaststroke and 200m individual medley.

What is the best thing about being disabled?

It's given me a lot more determination than most people, and that makes me want to succeed even more. Knowing that you have something more to overcome to succeed, it makes you a greater person.

What makes you angry?

The inequality between disabled and non-disabled people.

What's the stupidest thing anyone has ever said to you about your impairment?

If I'm not in the pool most people wouldn't recognise it. I walk with a limp but most people don't really notice.

Which disabled person do you most admire?

Everyone on the Paralympic team, especially the swimming team, because of how determined they are and what they've accomplished. They're having to get to the top of their chosen sport, as well as having to overcome the barriers of being disabled.

Sum up your personality in ten words or less

Determined, modest, chilled out and tough.

If you became Prime Minister, name one thing you would do to help disabled people

Anything that would raise the profile of disabled sport. Some of the able-bodied athletes have got MBEs and OBEs. I'm not saying that they haven't achieved amazing things, but there are disability athletes out there who have won so many medals who haven't been recognised or even got a pat on the back. Anything that would raise that higher.

What do you like most about your job?

The places I see. I get to travel quite a bit. Even though I have to get up early, I love it. It never feels like a chore, because I love sport. Also, all of the people I know and have got to meet through swimming. So really, the places, people, fitness levels and the life skills it's given me.

And what do you not like about it?

Getting up in the morning is pretty hard – I get up at half-five and I'm in the pool at six. When it's cold and wet outside, it's not good, but when you realise what you can win and what you can get out of it, it makes it all worthwhile. That again comes from the determination I have.

What is the one thing that could be invented to make your life as a disabled person easier?

Some kind of hovercraft wheelchair. I use a wheelchair sometimes, and kerbs and pavements make it ever so hard to get around.

What is your most surprising hidden talent?

I'm fairly musical, but I don't get much chance to practice because of the swimming. I can play the guitar and the piano. I also studied music theory and got to grade four.

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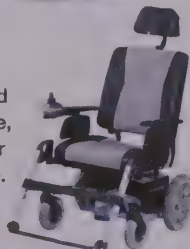
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Opening the inclusion Flood gates

Tara Flood is both a Paralympic champion and an award-winning, 24-7 campaigner. She tells **Sunil Peck** that her ambition is to lead the fight for a truly inclusive education system

Tara Flood is best known for campaigning for equality for disabled pupils in the education system.

But despite her reputation as a radical inclusionist, she scoffs at the suggestion that all special schools should be closed immediately.

"The truth is that if you shut every special school tomorrow, would inclusion happen for every single young disabled person?" she says. "It wouldn't, because mainstream isn't up to the job yet."

In July, Flood was recognised for her campaigning with the Alliance for Inclusive Education (Allfie) with an award from the Sheila McKechnie Foundation, which specialises in helping campaigners hone their campaigning skills.

Flood had never heard of the foundation until a friend emailed her

about it the day before the closing date for nominations. But she insists that the award means a lot to her. For one thing, it shows that "big-wigs in the third sector" recognise that the debate around inclusive education has moved on from being for or against special schools to ways in which disabled learners can be integrated into the mainstream system.

"I had what I thought was going to be a traumatic interview with Nick Partridge from the Terrence Higgins Trust and Adam Sampson from Shelter," Flood says, recalling interviews with the chief executives during the award's shortlisting process.

"But when I was talking to them about the *Inclusion Works* campaign, I really felt that they got it. I didn't feel that I had to trudge through the same debate around inclusion versus

segregation which is nearly always what I have to do when I talk about the work that the organisation does."

Flood says the award could prove a significant boost for Allfie.

"What you also get through the Sheila McKechnie programme, which I think is extremely valuable, is that they start to work with you around building a programme of support to make your campaign more effective. We couldn't pay for that at the organisation and I think raising our profile will be crucial for attracting more funders."

Gordon Brown presented Flood with the award (on her birthday, as it happens) and she used her ten seconds with him to request a meeting with children, schools and families secretary Ed Balls. The United Nations convention, which promotes rights and





JAMIE TROUNCE

equality for disabled people, is at the top of her agenda at the moment, and she is desperate to persuade Balls of the need to ratify the convention without giving the government an option to educate disabled pupils in special schools.

Flood describes herself as a survivor of the special school system. She gained a degree in applied social sciences before going on to gain an MA in disability studies. She turned her back on a career in the City to concentrate on campaigning for disability rights. She has worked for RADAR, the Disabled Living Foundation, Scope and Disability Awareness in Action.

Flood's campaigning button is "never switched off". But although she talks about the importance of fundraising and schmoozing with politicians, she says that the grass-

roots activists' penchant for direct action campaigning is still an important tool in the struggle for equality. Indeed, she led a march to the offices of the Department for Education and Skills in 2006, which

“We wouldn't have achieved as a movement the things that we have, had we not gone out and thrown red paint and demanded change”

resulted in the government reaffirming its commitment to a fully inclusive education system.

“We wouldn't have achieved as a movement the things that we have, had we not gone out and thrown red paint and demanded change,” she

says. “But there is also another way to campaign and that is to recognise who it is at the top of the decision-making tree. So if we can get radical politics into the offices of those people and say, ‘You have a responsibility to deliver equality by 2025, you're not going to do it until you listen to people like us,’ we should.”

The Labour government has, Flood says, served disabled people well in education, particularly with the introduction of legislation to place more disabled pupils in mainstream schools. But she also feels that Labour has undone its good work to some extent by being “too responsive” to media stories about parents and disabled children who have had a tough time in mainstream schools.

“When you unpick the stories saying that inclusion isn't working and inclusion is a human rights abuse, there wouldn't be a single inclusionist that would call that inclusion. At best it would be poorly-resourced integration where a disabled person has been thrown into a mainstream school without the support they need and the school hasn't got the support that it needs to change its environment or its curriculum.”

Flood says that a victory for David Cameron at the next election would be a disaster for disabled people and could scupper any chance of achieving equality.

“At this point in time, a Conservative victory in two years could potentially set the UK on a path back to the bad old days for the majority of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs labels.”

She stresses that disabled people must make it a priority to convince the Conservatives of the importance of a transition framework that builds the capacity of the mainstream system to



"If it goes, it means that people with my level of impairment continue to compete. But as the Paralympics has become more and more mainstream, athletes with a higher level of impairment have slowly been excluded from competing. So swimmers with my level of impairment have very little opportunity to compete now."

Flood has no problem with elite athletes like Oscar Pistorius and



HAARLEDRONING

Natalie Du Toit participating in the Olympics, but she is concerned that they may have lost sight of the importance of the Paralympics.

"I was desperate to compete. I didn't care where it was, I was just desperate to achieve. With Oscar Pistorius and Natalie Du Toit, their desire to achieve at the Olympics takes precedence over their desire to achieve at the Paralympics. In my view, there is no difference between an Olympic and a

When asked about her future plans as a campaigner, Flood replies: "I live campaigning 24-7 because I have to challenge disablism 24-7. But my ambition is that the Alliance for Inclusive Education becomes the true leader of the inclusion movement and supports organisations like Scope to transform its education services. It's about working with other people to say what's possible for disabled young people." ■



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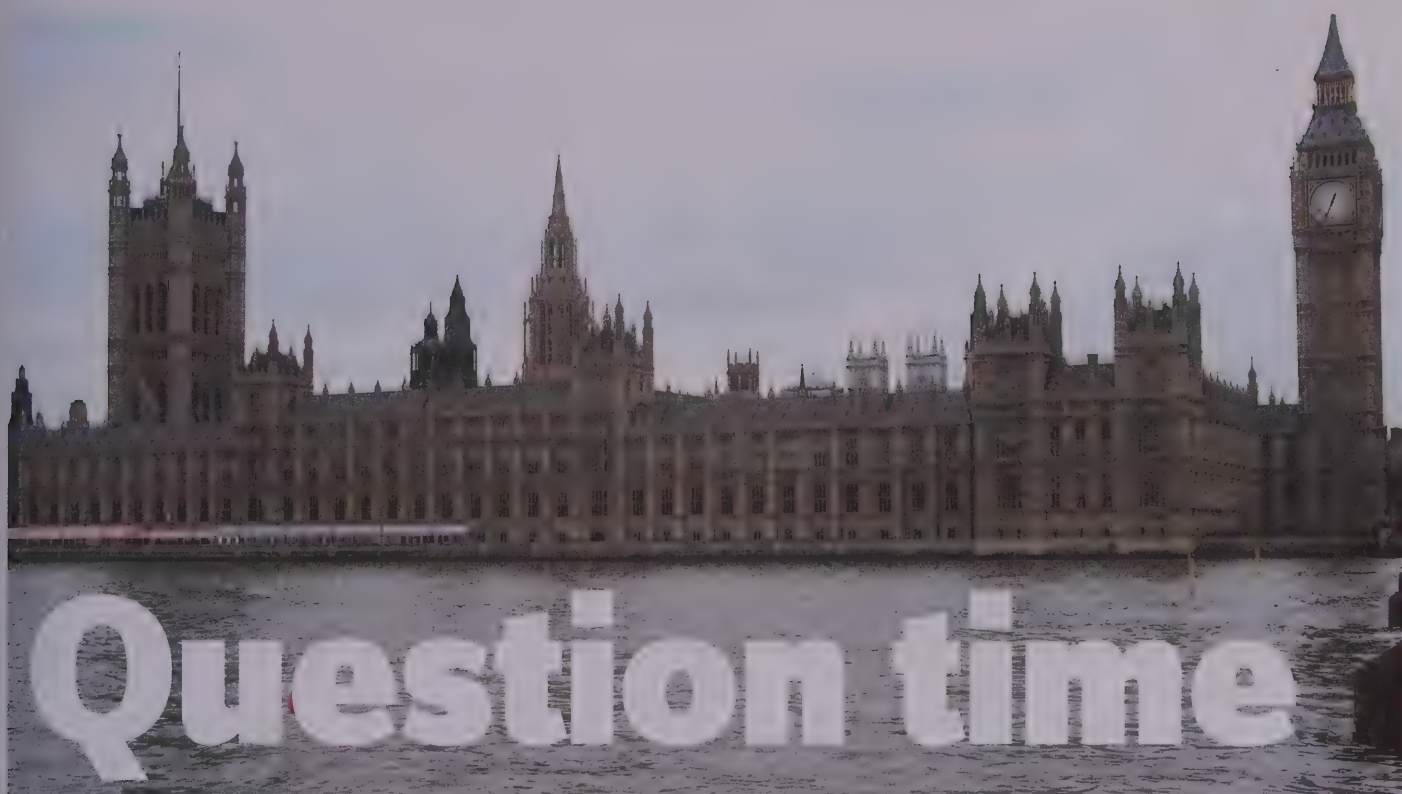


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JAMIE TROUNCE

Question time

When politicians such as David Blunkett have proved themselves at the highest levels of political life, why are there still so few disabled people in the Houses of Parliament? **Sunil Peck** investigates

Disabled people have risen to become some of this country's most well-respected parliamentarians. There are David Blunkett and Anne Begg in the Commons, Jane Campbell in the Lords, and Jack Ashley has served in both Houses, to name but a few.

But there are no more than a large handful of MPs and peers who declare an impairment, and disabled MPs particularly are still rare.

This doesn't apply further down the political ladder. Disabled people are well represented in local government, where around one in ten councillors is disabled.

So does the parliamentary system itself make it difficult for disabled people to participate in politics at a national level?

Former home secretary David Blunkett (*right*), Labour MP for Sheffield Brightside since 1987, says it can be

difficult to acquire the high profile and experience to be selected as a parliamentary candidate, particularly where more traditional routes to becoming an MP, such as trade unions and local government, are no longer so well-used.



MARK DAVIDSON

Paul Flynn has been Labour MP for Newport West since 1987. He was not concerned that his arthritis would count against him when he fought that first successful election, because he was well-known in the constituency. "Also, you tend to over-compensate and work harder than anyone else," he says. "You have to be seen to be active."

Campaigning can be done over the phone, and posters and other printed material can be used instead of traditional knocking on doors, he says.

But the Commons can be a hostile place to work. One MP was using a wheelchair temporarily and had "great difficulties" securing a more accessible office from the whips. Another was having trouble walking down nine stairs and up another 20 to his office, but was told he would have to wait his turn behind a former secretary of state.



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with] ill health. Until we can separate those two things out then I suspect that MPs with disabilities will continue to underplay their disability."

Indeed, a report by the all party parliamentary group on mental health shows one in five MPs surveyed has experienced a mental health problem but has not disclosed it because of a fear of stigma and discrimination.

No wonder, perhaps, when archaic common law states that "lunatics" – those with mental health problems – are not allowed to stand for parliament, and any MP sectioned under the Mental Health Act for six months will automatically lose their seat.

So what about those MPs who acquire impairments once they have entered the Commons?

Andrew Turner, Conservative MP for the Isle of Wight, was elected in 2005 with a majority of nearly 13,000. He had a stroke in 2006 and after a few months to recuperate, has resumed work. He says he has been taken aback by the subsequent support from his constituents.

The example of Lord [Jack] Ashley (below) proves that, once in the Commons, and with support, disabled →



Flynn (above) says: "The allocation of offices is used for party discipline and it's used to reward people for voting for the government and being loyal. Disability is not the top priority."

Anne Begg (right), Labour MP for Aberdeen South since 1997, says the job would be demanding for anyone. She says a good education and employment background are vital. "I was a teacher for 19 years, I was active in the teachers' trade union at a national level, so I had a profile and I had done work that would be challenging for anybody in a wheelchair. I had to fight very hard to get into teaching, so I had all of that in my background. So when people looked at me as a disabled person, they looked at someone who was capable of doing quite a demanding job."

Begg says there are more disabled MPs than is commonly thought because some, like the Prime Minister, choose not to talk about their impairment in public.

She suspects that, while some MPs simply don't identify themselves as being disabled, others keep quiet because of the perceived stigma.

"The problem with the general public is that disability [is often associated

MPs can do the job.

He lost his hearing a couple of years after entering the Commons in 1966 and remained an MP until 1992, although he doubts that he would have been elected for the first time as a deaf man.

"I think that the fact of me being in parliament and having been so busy on so many issues in the two years while I was hearing was very significant. It got the attention of the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and he supported me staying in, and the local party supported me staying in."

He did find it difficult. "Much of the dialogue was incomprehensible, but my wife helped me enormously and because of her I stayed in. But had I decided to get into parliament when I was totally deaf, I think it would have been impossible. I may be wrong, but I don't think so."

He is probably right, as there are no profoundly deaf MPs. "But anyone with any kind of disability, like using a wheelchair, will still find it difficult because of the common prejudice against disabled people," he adds.

So is it any easier in the Lords?



Baroness [Jane] Campbell (*below*) has been a crossbench peer since 2007. She chairs the Equality and Human Rights Commission's disability committee, and has also chaired the Social Care Institute for Excellence. But despite this background in public life, she says fighting an election would have been too demanding.

"I could not do several hustings meetings in one night. There is no way that someone like me could go through the arduous route of becoming an MP. You apply for the job in the Lords on your merits, you don't go around the country trying to schmooze people to get elected."

She expected the Lords to be a stuffy place full of doddering old rich men, but

staff bent over backwards to accommodate her access needs. She has a room where she can lie down, with a fridge to store her medication. She keeps her speeches short and although her PAs are not allowed into the chamber to talk on her behalf when she is having breathing difficulties, other peers can read out her words instead.

Lord [Dominic] Addington has dyslexia, which he thinks helps him thrive in the Lords. He believes using the spoken word enables him to be more responsive during debates, although things can be difficult when he is "bombarded" with letters and memos.

"My main coping strategy is the telephone. I will not indulge in email conversations. I would much rather talk to someone in person. With a parliamentary briefing, I will generally ask to be talked through it."

Baroness [Rosalie] Wilkins, a wheelchair-user, says the Lords is generally an accepting place, although no concessions are made when voting, with all peers given just eight minutes to reach the lobby.

Lord [Colin] Low has found the Lords friendly, although he has had to negotiate a couple of access issues. He can't see the clock during debates, so an official taps him on the shoulder when he has one minute left to speak. And question time can be a bit of a free-for-all, but he says other peers are considerate when they see him stand up to speak.

But what of the future? Could we see more disabled people in Parliament, particularly in the Commons?

Saghir Alam (*above*), a commissioner for the Disability Rights Commission, and a member of the disability committee of its successor, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and the government's Equality 2025 advisory network of



ABI HARDWICK

disabled people, failed to be selected as the prospective parliamentary Labour candidate for Sheffield Central earlier this year.

Although he was pleased to come second out of 50 candidates, he concluded that attitudes can be a significant barrier to disabled people. Local party members urged him to keep quiet about his physical impairment in case the selection panel thought he would not be able to cope with campaigning and canvassing. "I don't think they did it in a negative way, I think they did it in a caring way. But it shows a perception that disability can hold someone back."

The main parties appear to accept there should be more disabled MPs.

A Labour Party spokesman told us it works with the Labour disabled

Even though diversity is currently high on the political agenda, none of the three main political parties have run any high-profile campaigns

members group to encourage and support disabled people to stand for election as councillors and MPs. The disability spokesmen for the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, John Barrett and Mark Harper, also say their parties are looking at ways to increase the number of disabled people participating in politics.

Both claim the highly competitive job makes it unsuitable for some disabled people, although that does not prevent them playing an active role in public life.

Abigail Lock, Scope's parliamentary affairs manager, has spent over two years researching the selection processes of the three main parties. She says inflexible processes and assumptions about what MPs should look like can exclude disabled people. And the extra costs faced by disabled people, who may need to use taxis, PAs or interpreters, must all be met from their own pockets.

She adds: "Even though diversity is currently high on the political agenda, none of the three main political parties have run any high-profile campaigns to increase the number of disabled people standing as candidates."

"Without a specific drive focusing on disability, barriers that are unique to disabled people will continue to be overlooked." ■




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Disabled women are twice as likely as non-disabled women to experience domestic violence, are less likely to report it and are more likely to experience it for longer before attempting to escape, ground-breaking new research finds. **Katharine Quarmby** asks what can be done to change this bleak picture

At night times he'd be in the living room and I'd be in my bedroom and he'd shut the door on me...if I wanted to use the toilet or anything he'd tell me to piss myself there and then. Now obviously for me if I was non-disabled I'd be able to get up and do it...There was slapping on the face, chucking me out of the wheelchair."

This is just one of the stories uncovered by the first comprehensive, national piece of research on disabled women's experience of domestic violence, what their needs are and what services are available to them, published this summer by the charity Women's Aid. Disabled consultants were involved in the research by the Violence against Women Research Group and the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being, at the Universities of Bristol and Warwick respectively.

They focussed on disabled women with physical and sensory impairments (funding was not available to extend the project to interview women with learning difficulties and mental health problems). They held a focus group with disabled women, interviews with activists and practitioners, two surveys

Behind closed doors

of domestic violence organisations and disability organisations and in-depth interviews with 30 disabled women who had experienced domestic violence.

The definition of domestic violence was extended to cover the different types of violence experienced by disabled women: "Disabled women experiencing abuse from partners, ex-partners, other family members, or personal assistants (including paid and informal care workers)."

A growing body of research suggests that disabled women are more likely to be abused than non-disabled women and that their impairments are often used as mechanisms of control

by the abuser.

One wheelchair-user talked about her enforced isolation: "One time he actually took the battery out of this wheelchair I'm in now. He just unplugged it so I couldn't move...and [he would] shove me about sometimes and push me hard."

One interviewee said: "He took my complete independence where I had to ask him a fortnight before I needed sanitary towels to make sure I'd get them."

A deaf woman was sexually abused by her partner: "Being Deaf is hard work...you have to concentrate so much harder and tiring...to lip-read all the time...I'd be exhausted. And he'd



“One time he took the battery out of this wheelchair I'm in now. He just unplugged it so I couldn't move... and he would shove me about some-times and push me hard”

with visual impairments. Refuges, already very overstretched in budgetary terms, acknowledged that they wanted to do more, but struggled with resourcing issues to make adaptations.

Another problem was that women found it difficult to move area to escape violence because that might mean that they would lose their care package, PAs and adapted accommodation. They had more complex needs than non-disabled women, such as transport, assistance with personal care or sign language interpreters, that were less likely to be met. Most interviewed had experienced abuse over a long period of time, ranging from one year to 22 years and some had been abused by more than one person.

Very few disability organisations surveyed considered dealing with domestic violence to be part of their remit. Only four out of 73 employed dedicated staff with domestic violence expertise.

In all, 133 local domestic violence services responded to the survey, and just over one-third said they offered some form of specific service to disabled women. Many were attempting to make their refuges accessible, but over three-quarters believed they would breach the Disability Discrimination Act. Around half provided disability equality training, and disabled women accounted for seven per cent of users of those services. There is some good practice, but it is patchy – there is only one refuge for women with learning

be furious and slap me and kick me awake...it was sex all the time, twice a day and he would shout at me and then hold me down and I hated it, I hated it.”

Most of the disabled women interviewed were abused by intimate male partners but a number of paid carers or personal assistants (PAs) also abused women, leading to calls for this to be recognised by the police as domestic violence.

One woman said: “I have been stolen from and abused by my care workers and then there was a huge argument with social services and the housing people because they refused to believe it or even investigate it. They were just on the care workers' side.”

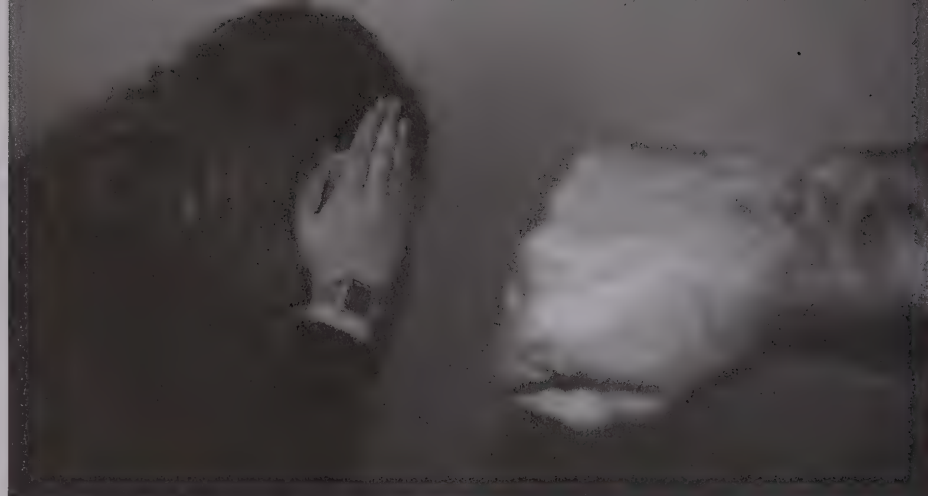
A number of those interviewed said that social care professionals did not want to believe that they were being systematically abused, whether by carers or partners. Some disabled women did not recognise what happened to them as abuse, and others feared that if they told social services about the problem, they would be institutionalised or their children taken away. Very few refuges were accessible and many women believed that they could not be accommodated according to their needs – with reason. Only half of refuges surveyed had full wheelchair access, half had an adapted shower, only half had reachable light switches and sockets and only 17 per cent had services for people

JAMIE TROUNCE



difficulties in the UK. Leeds council has also trailblazed in developing good practice for disabled women experiencing domestic violence – and employed a disabled project worker to develop the work of the Leeds Interagency Project. The project has produced a free video and training pack, *Disbelief*, provides one-to-one support for disabled women and has produced accessible information. The local refuge is also one of the few to have been refurbished with accessibility in mind.

Dr Ravi Tiara, one of two academics who carried out the research, said they had found that disabled women were enduring domestic violence for long periods of time before disclosing it and that those with high dependency needs were more likely to experience high levels of abuse. Women had their medication stolen, their direct payments were taken from them and those interviewed felt that abuse from carers was “widespread and common”. She concluded that “abuse was preferable to care agencies moving in” and that women endured abuse because they had “nowhere to go”. Even when they did go, she added, because of the dearth of accessible accommodation, they were more likely to experience post separation violence for a longer period.



JAMIE TROUNCE

Diane Mulligan, a commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), describes the research as “key” and says that its findings will help push the issue “up the agenda”. She says that the EHRC will discuss why so few disability organisations see domestic violence as their remit and whether it can fund

“A lot of disabled people are trapped in relationships that non-disabled people would leave because they can't get the funded support they need”

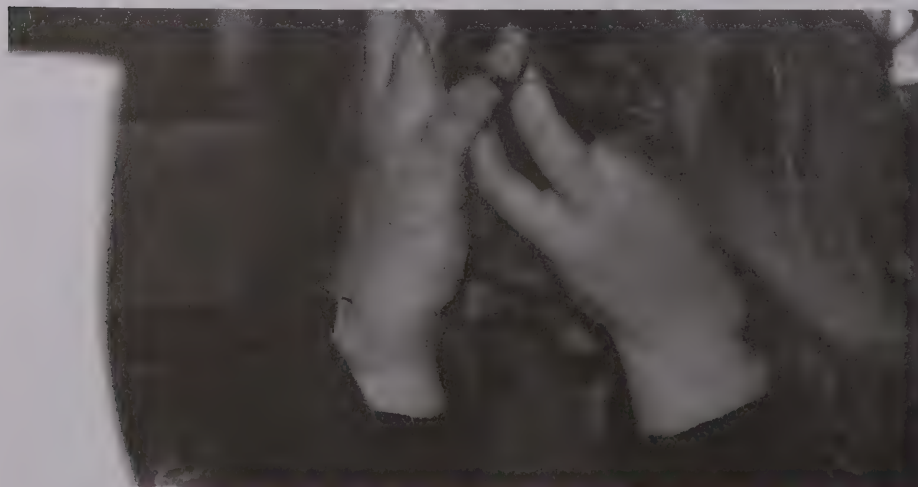
work and awareness-raising in this area. The commission will be publishing its own recommendations for reform of domestic violence services and addressing violence against women in the late autumn.

In addition to the research recommendations, Women's Aid is

to review whether it needs to produce new guidance or checklists for its services.

Ruth Bashall, who provided disability equality training to the researchers, says that disabled people's organisations, which could reach out to victims of domestic violence, are overstretched and that too many remain male-dominated. She says: “There is a real fear of being perceived as a vulnerable victim,” and that many disabled women fear that they will be institutionalised if they report abuse. “We are determined to stay in the community,” she says, and adds that the portability debate – the ability to take your package of support with you if you move to a different part of the country – is key to helping disabled women flee domestic violence.

Anne Pridmore, chair of the engagement and influence committee at Scope, who was consulted on the project, says that “disabled women and their experience of violence have been neglected for far too long.” She welcomed the research into carer and PA abuse. “I think that there are many forms of abuse, that people don't see as such... with personalisation and individual budgets there will be people employing their own PAs and carers and it is very difficult to prove when abuse happens, and very difficult to dismiss someone.” She was not surprised by the level of abuse endured by women from intimate partners. “A lot of disabled people are trapped in relationships that non-disabled people would leave,” she says, “because they can't get the funded support they need.” ■



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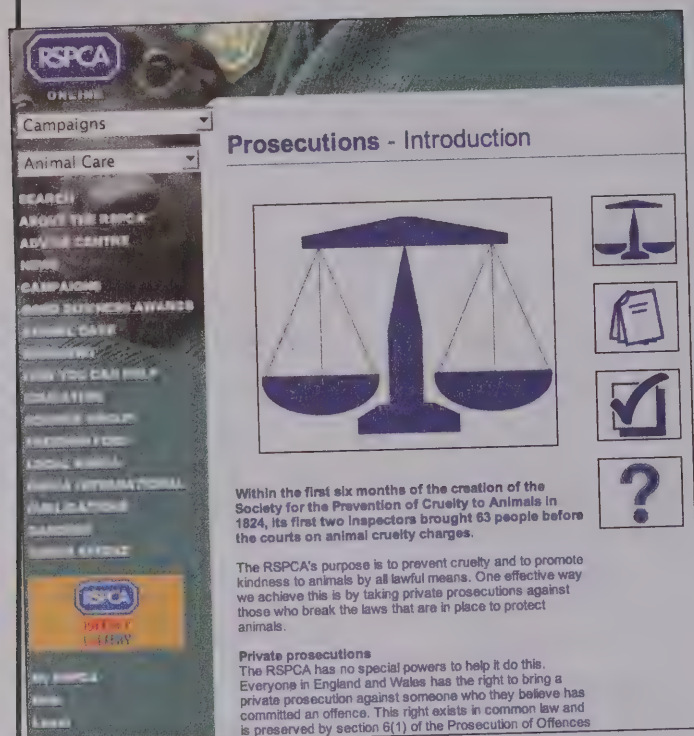
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yourviews

RSPCA prosecutions never taken lightly



In response to your article (*Disability Now August, Hounded*), prosecutions are never taken lightly by the RSPCA. Prosecutions are only brought by the RSPCA following a consistent, fair and independent review of the evidence, to help ensure that the RSPCA's prosecution work commands public confidence. This is particularly so in those cases involving vulnerable people.

The code for Crown Prosecutors is applied by the RSPCA continuously throughout the decision-making process, in the

same way it is applied by the Crown Prosecution Service. This is a broad test that considers the seriousness of the offence, the public interest in bringing a prosecution and the likely sentence to be obtained in the event of a conviction, which is significantly affected by a person's particular circumstances.

As an animal welfare charity, we aim to protect the animals in the case and others that may be at risk in the future.

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ated by us in 2007 by providing owners with help and advice on animal care.

Officers also work with other agencies where expertise and help for other issues may be necessary.

However, in a handful of cases, ongoing animal cruelty can, unfortunately, only be prevented through court action.

RSPCA inspectors are trained to deal with animal welfare and quickly identify anyone who may be vulnerable; if in doubt they are treated as such and given the required legal protection.

All inspectors have equal opportunities training which encompasses disability and mental health issues.

In addition, the legal training module includes the protection of vulnerable persons in relation to both the Human Rights Act and PACE (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act), and is reinforced throughout the training course.

If a prosecution is undertaken against anyone, ultimately the court considers whether it is appropriate to do so.

Sally Case, RSPCA head of prosecutions

Government must help meet fuel costs

I am a divorced woman with multiple sclerosis, a full-time wheelchair-user and sadly no longer able to remain in my admin post with the local health authority. My income has been cut dramatically, and I have £112 a week to live on. I need the following electrical equipment: two overhead tracking hoists, on constant charge, two powered wheelchairs that need charging each day, an environmental system, and an electric bed.

The government gives disabled people free bus travel – but I am unable to get my chair onto the local buses as 90 per cent of them have steps. My Motability car is great but I had to have diesel and that costs far more than petrol.

Due to my condition, I feel the cold, already wear several layers and use a hot-water bottle. I have had my home insulated and double-glazed and the boiler is now A-rated. There is nothing more I can do about the cost of heating my home. I have changed fuel providers so many times I have lost count.

I dread this winter. I am unable to work. Short of letting my Independent Living Fund carer go and trying to manage without support, what can I do?

We are told we are given enough to keep warm and that the elderly need it more. The fuel allowance is given to everybody over 60 regardless of their income, work status or even if they are in the country during the winter. Do I have to sit in the library all day to keep warm and come home to a cold house in the dark? How can we stop them ignoring us again?

Alison Lewis, Marlow, Buckinghamshire

Oscar brings respect

Were I not a reader of *Disability Now* I might not have heard of "bladerunner" Oscar Pistorius and his prosthetics (*Disability Now* August, *Games without frontiers*). Even now I find it unbelievable that the IAAF wanted to ban him because his prosthetics gave him a "clear mechanical advantage". What of the disadvantage of having both legs amputated: did that not more than compensate?

Anyway, Oscar's blades have not given him such an advantage as he has failed to reach the qualifying standard; however, Oscar and others like him have succeeded in making Paralympics of mainstream interest and commanding respect from the media and public.

Spencer Arnott, Holmer Green, Buckinghamshire

New format is 'harder to handle'

As a regular reader of *Disability Now* I applauded the appointment of a disabled editor. Ironically that change seems to have been accompanied by the introduction of a less accessible magazine format.

I find that the binding of the new magazine makes it impossible to read because I do not have the hand strength to open the pages as I would with a newspaper or spiral bound format. Many disabled people with whom I work experience the same thing.

When I raised a similar issue with the Office for



Disability Issues about one of their publications, I got the 30 copies I requested with spiral binding. What plans do you have to offer *Disability Now* in a more

accessible print format?
Clare Evans MBE, Calne, Wiltshire

The Editor replies: A print magazine is clearly going to present a variety of access challenges and one person's perfection will always be someone else's nightmare. Equally clearly, we cannot offer a bespoke solution for each reader but we are constantly reviewing the ways in which we present *Disability Now* to ensure that it meets as wide a range of access requirements as possible.

Sex advice should be much more positive

Simon Parritt's answer to the young couple with cerebral palsy with regard to their wish to have intercourse raises some interesting moral dilemmas for social support staff and the role they should or are willing to perform; but telling them that they shouldn't get too "hung up" on doing what others do or aim too high too quickly is not the answer. Would this same advice be given to a non-disabled 21-year-old who perhaps had difficulty getting an erection?

Perhaps the couple may be able to pay for a sex worker who would assist them in exploring whether penetrative sex is for them. Given this opportunity, they would at least know for themselves what is or is not possible.

Anne Pridmore, Market Harborough, Leicestershire

Simon Parritt replies: The short answer is yes, I would give the same advice to

anyone. That's not to imply it isn't also a rights issue. When helping real people in real distress, a gentle and humane approach that will achieve the most happiness is what is required. Fighting the system is a parallel process, politically important for all disabled people and us as professionals. However, as a disabled psychologist and human being my first priority is my fellow human who comes to me for help.

→ Have your say

- write to us *Disability Now*, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

andyrickell



The answer is easy

The government's single equality bill is an important step forward, says **Andy Rickell**, but it is lacking in ambition

I felt privileged five years ago, while chief executive of what is now the UK Disabled People's Council, to represent non-governmental disability organisations on the government taskforce that helped set up the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

I am pleased that the government has picked up a unanimous recommendation of that taskforce, that with a single equality commission, it makes sense to have a single piece of equalities legislation.

The big question is, can this consolidation help overcome the weaknesses in the Disability Discrimination Acts (DDA), and create a coherence and effectiveness in equality legislation which clearly does not exist – witness persistent inequalities for women and black and minority ethnic communities in particular. Or will it be a hotchpotch of limited measures that reflect political priorities?

Let's be honest. The DDA is fundamentally flawed. Its

worst flaw is that the definition of disability is such a mealy-mouthed impairment-based set of words as to fail to protect hundreds of thousands of people who experience really negative discrimination. Instead, all the new legislation needs to say is that it covers people who experience discrimination because of actual or perceived impairment. The law should not be about proving you are impaired, but that you suffer unfair discrimination.

All the new legislation needs to say is that it protects anybody who experiences unfair discrimination or treatment. It does not need to specify particular grounds like race or gender or religion, so it can cover everybody equally, and would therefore include well-known areas of discrimination like "class".

Note that I said "unfair" discrimination. Discrimination happens all the time. When we genuinely choose the best person for the job, that is discrimination, and it's fair. Or when we genuinely choose the best person to

undergo rationed medical treatment on the basis of clinical need or quality of life, that is fair discrimination, too. The difficulty is that we all bring a whole range of pre-conceptions about whether certain people are "better" candidates than others, and individuals have a right to be protected by law when our pre-conceptions muddy our behaviour and they suffer unfairly.

The law should not be about proving you are impaired, but that you suffer unfair discrimination

People may say this approach is ridiculous, as claims of inequality will be made on spurious grounds. Not so. You would have to prove that you were unfairly disadvantaged in comparison to other people. In my experience, people only want

to go to court over discrimination which is major or blatant. Timewasters could be sifted out.

Which brings me to the other fundamental weakness of the DDA: the inability to enforce our rights. Employment tribunals seem to work relatively well. But educational tribunals are heavily weighted against the disabled child and their parents, and the county court system is too onerous for individual disabled people to take discrimination cases on goods or services. Having a clearly designated equality tribunal, modelled on employment tribunals, with limited costs for the genuine claimant, would offer real social justice to those who most need it.

The existence of the bill is important. But the current draft needs to be more ambitious, if equality is really the government's intention.

• **Andy Rickell is an executive director at Scope**

→ Have your say

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Q I have for many years been unable to drive because I have a trapped nerve which causes loss of feeling in my left hand. A driving instructor/examiner said I was not safe to drive because I was unable to do an emergency stop or control the steering-wheel. I also have other impairments, and find it difficult to use foot pedals or gears. I have access to work funding for a driver but would love to be independent. I tried power-steering automatic cars but

there was too much pain in my neck and shoulders.
Beryl Savage, King's Lynn, Norfolk



Ed Passant: I note that a driving instructor/examiner advised that you were not safe to drive but I am not sure how recently this was or whether this individual was trained to assess disabled people or aware of the full range of adaptations now available. Control systems can be positioned to maximise

comfort and regulated to allow use with the minimum of physical effort. Obviously, individual circumstances will vary but, because of improvements in technology, it is increasingly the case that people are unable to drive because of vision or cognitive difficulties, rather than inability to operate control systems. I think you should contact your local Mobility Centre for a full assessment of your needs. They will also advise on licensing matters and the requirement to notify the DVLA, who ultimately make the decision on fitness to drive. Ring the Forum of Mobility Centres national advice line on (freephone) 0800 559 3636 or via www.mobility-centres.org.uk

Q I have a battery-powered NHS wheelchair. I have a bus pass and was in Caerphilly today. The

Stagecoach bus driver said I need to supply them with the weight of the wheelchair. I saw a notice in the bus that states the maximum weight is 300kg. It used to be 400kg. There is no way myself and the wheelchair are 300kg or 400kg. They just do not want to get their ramps out. Now I have to get proof of the weight of my wheelchair in writing or they won't let me on their buses. What next? I am not a huge bloke. I am thin. No way is my wheelchair that weight.
Stephen Lewis, Caerphilly, South Wales



Eleanor Williams: First of all, Stagecoach is not allowed to give you less favourable treatment than it would give to someone else, just because you are disabled. That would be discrimination. The

THE EXPERTS

Answering questions on **Relationships** is **Simon Parritt**, a counselling psychologist who has studied psychosexual therapy. Simon was the only disabled director of the former Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal

Relationships of People with a Disability (SPOD). We have two **Legal** experts on our panel. **Eleanor Williams** is an employment lawyer specialising in discrimination at Darwin Gray solicitors. Disabled herself, Eleanor lectures

widely and holds a number of advisory positions. **Douglas Joy** is the senior solicitor at the Disability Law Service and is blind. He started working in community care and mental health law in 2002. Other **Benefits and Debt**

questions are answered by **Gary Martin**, who is welfare benefits supervisor at Walthamstow Citizens Advice Bureau. Our **Equipment** guru is **John Mandrak**, who is blind and has worked for nearly 25 years as a disability

Stagecoach website states that its new buses are designed to be fully accessible to disabled people. So we can assume Stagecoach knows the law and its obligations under the government's Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations standards. However, Stagecoach may have convincing reasons for changing the weight limit. You need to find out what those reasons are. They may be afraid of health and safety implications. Those implications may not be well founded, though. The Practical Guide for Buses and Scheduled Coaches, by the Disability Rights Commission, reported that government research in 2006 found "a limited number of bus companies which permit scooters to travel on their buses after they have been assessed as being able to fit safely into the wheelchair space. The owners of such scooters are issued with a form of accreditation confirming that they can use

the bus, which they can show to the driver when boarding." So there seem to be legitimate space, but not weight, implications. But even space implications can be overcome. Again, a letter to Stagecoach would clarify their reasons. Perhaps you could also give them the make and model number of your electric wheelchair and ask them to issue you with a form of accreditation. They can then assess its suitability.

Q My housing association had agreed to, and partially completed, work to adapt my flat, which had been approved by an occupational therapist (OT). The housing association was then taken over. I expected the work to continue but it has stopped. The new housing association wanted documentary evidence that it was approved and when I provided it, they said they lost it. They also brought in another OT, who suggested that different adaptations

are carried out, which I believe would not suit my needs. Do I have any rights to insist that the original work is finished? Also, the new association requires an OT assessment for the most minor work, such as lowering a door handle. Are they within their rights?
Claudia



Kate Sheehan: Your case is very complicated, as my initial

thought would be to ask for a copy of the correspondence with your occupational therapist and the previous housing association, which should have been ample evidence of the work being agreed. However, when asking for further clarification of your situation, it would appear that two occupational

therapists have come up with two different options. If the OT and housing association disagree with your self-assessment of need, I recommend that you ask for a second opinion from an independent OT. The following web site will help you find an independent therapist: www.otip.co.uk. For minor works, Housing Corporation best practice guidance indicates very clearly that certain adaptations should be fast-tracked through the general maintenance programme. It would be my opinion that this is a reasonable request and does not need an OT to assess for it. I would therefore ask the housing association again if they would carry out this small piece of work within the spirit of the above guidance.

→ If you have a question for our panel

- phone us 020 7619 7323
- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

journalist and consultant. He is an advisor on the Disabled Living Foundation's helpline. Answering questions on Travel is **Andy Wright**, who is disabled and is managing director of Accessible Travel, a

specialist tour operator providing holidays for people with mobility impairments. Our Finance expert is **David Clarke**, who is blind, has spent 14 years in banking and is now a senior partner with Clydesdale Bank. **Kate**

Sheehan answers your questions on **Property**. She is a director of Years Ahead, which meets the needs of the ageing population, and an occupational therapist with 20 years' experience and a passionate interest in housing. **Motoring**

questions are dealt with by **Ed Passant**, chief executive of the Forum of Mobility Centres, the umbrella body for 17 independent organisations which provide driver and passenger assessment for disabled people.

backchat

A £314m track record



Our yoga-loving work and pensions secretary,

James Purnell, has been trumpeting the appointment of Tim Matthews as Remploy's new chief executive.

Matthews, he says, has "a proven track record in managing change within the public sector".

Just the ticket, with Remploy having closed 28 of its factories in the last year and being told the others will only stay open if it cuts costs.

Clearly, Purnell was not concerned by his new man's appearance before the Commons transport committee in 2003.

Matthews was then chief executive of the Highways Agency, which in 2001/02 had somehow managed to overspend by...wait for it...£314 million.

Quite an achievement, I'm sure you'll agree. As did the committee, which described the figures – blamed on an accounting systems failure – as "completely unacceptable".

Let's hope there's no such

cock-up at Remploy. It should be safe. Its total revenue in 2007 was only £290 million.

Brown's cold comfort



Gordon Brown is reported to be planning to help "Britain's poorest families" with their fuel bills this winter.

The help, apparently, will be targeted at households claiming child or working tax credits.

No mention, of course, of disabled people. In 2006, we revealed the strongest

evidence yet that disabled people under 60 were dying every winter because they could not afford to heat their homes. And this February, we reported new government figures showing that more than 600,000 disabled people were living in fuel poverty, even before the latest hefty price rises.

Backchat can only assume that, if all this is true, our (visually-impaired) Prime Minister has come up with a masterplan to win the next election without the support of more than nine million disabled voters.

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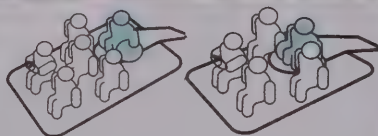
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guestcolumn

Barrier grief

The government's new welfare reform plans will only stigmatise more disabled people, says disabled academic **Ruth Patrick** (right)

We've all been there. Meeting new people in the pub, talking to a stranger at a wedding, or making small talk with a taxi-driver. It's just a matter of time until the question, "So, what do you do?" rears its head. Everywhere you go, the job you have, and whether or not you are employed, is used to judge, stereotype and compartmentalise.

Unfortunately, the Labour government's constant stress on the responsibility to work, and increasingly punitive measures to ensure that everyone who "can" work does, only increase the likelihood that those who do not work, for whatever reason, find themselves marginalised and stigmatised.

The single-minded emphasis on paid work affects us all, with disabled people now brought under the government's distorting welfare-to-work microscope. Reforms announced in July* will see those disabled welfare claimants judged able to work expected to participate in "work-related

activity", or risk losing some of their benefit. Gordon Brown wants to get one million more disabled people into work and sees these reforms as capable of delivering this goal. But will the proposals succeed and what do disabled people think of them?

In my research, I explored attitudes to these reforms with disabled people in Leeds and uncovered findings that suggest the government's reforms are based on a false analysis of the problem. Yes, many disabled people do want to work, but compulsion and the threat of benefit withdrawal are clumsy tools to achieve this. As Dave**, one of the participants, put it: "There are so many disabled people who want to work but aren't able to because of people's attitudes."

Indeed, compelling disabled people to work when many face physical, attitudinal and societal barriers which prevent them participating as equals in the labour market, is more than a little perverse. It harks back to a model of disability that places the root of the problem with



the disabled person rather than our disabling society.

What is more, the constant stress on paid work neglects all the other forms of contribution which disabled people make. Many of the disabled people I spoke to volunteer, have caring responsibilities, manage direct payments and/or participate in forums as service-users.

If the government really wants to help disabled people into work it should put its energies and resources into challenging discrimination, poor access and societal barriers. What is more, they need to listen more to the

real experts on disability – disabled people themselves. Mike**, another participant, rightly asked for "a much better understanding of what disability actually means to individuals, before making policy decisions which... affect millions of disabled people".

*The government's most recent proposals are outlined in the green paper *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*. To take part in a consultation on the reforms, visit www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform
**Names changed to protect confidentiality

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Sophie's new model army

Although she only came runner-up, the real star of the reality TV show *Britain's Missing Top Model* was surely **Sophie Morgan**. Having become disabled five years ago in a car crash, she says she is now determined to fight for inclusion

“We're at an advantage because we have something unique about us that makes us stand out from the crowd”



My accident changed things for me enormously. I never really thought about disability before I was disabled; it just wasn't a part of my life, wasn't in my world. But now obviously it's a huge part.

Having lived in both worlds, it is really interesting to see how it's so much harder than it should be for disabled people. For me it's a new thing that I want to change and make it as easy as it was before. I've been introduced to it in an aggressive and violent way, I'm shell-shocked and I want to try and bring things back and change things I don't see as fair. People born this way have a very different attitude but I think for me, I will always, always have a huge passion for changing the way we are approached, acknowledged and included.

The show (left) demonstrated how visually shocking it was for someone like myself, who uses a wheelchair, to be on the catwalk. Maybe that's what it would take to change things, something shocking, to mix people up. You don't see disability in the public eye that often. If you were to see a *Blue Peter* presenter with a disfigurement or speech impediment, kids

would grow up with that and it wouldn't be such a big shock when they see someone like that on the street.

It would make it easier not only for people without disabilities to understand what it's like but also for people with disabilities to feel a lot less ostracised and a lot more involved, not so separate from everyone else. It would bring an integration which I think is really important.

It's not about bringing in disabled people for the sake of it, it's that if there is someone who is right for the job, they shouldn't be discriminated against because of their disability.

In many ways, we're at an advantage because we have something unique about us that makes us stand out from the crowd. But that's also a huge disadvantage. People often aren't ready to allow us in, so it's up to us to try our hardest to make things happen. We're pushing doors that are closed. It's important for us that if you want to make a change, to just go out there and do it. It will be difficult, but our lives are difficult anyway. It's about us trying our hardest and trying to persuade people we can do it. It's up to us to try and change things.

• **Sophie Morgan** was talking to **Cathy Reay**



Wheelie beautiful

After only a year in business, WheelieChix is making its name on the catwalks. **Kelly Mullan** talked to its founder, Louisa Summerfield, about its progress and took a look at its autumn/winter collection

Luckily, WheelieChix managing director Louisa Summerfield thrives under pressure.

"The samples for the Beyond Boundaries show [an annual exhibition of disability products and services] were due to arrive from Turkey two days before the show but the plane crash-landed in Romania. We got the clothes an hour before the show and had to throw the models into them."

Since launching WheelieChix during London Fashion week a year ago, Louisa Summerfield has been on a learning curve as steep as her plunging necklines.

New to the fashion industry, this former City solicitor turned sex phone-line worker now coordinates the design, manufacture



and online retail of her own line of clothes created for women using wheelchairs.

"I have rheumatoid arthritis so I've always had problems with dressing. Fastenings were always a pain and then when I became a permanent wheelchair-user it was the shape and things riding up.

"The clothes that were available were, to me, frumpy granny-wear. That's a big market but it's not my market. WheelieChix is for young wheelchair-users to feel glamorous and not have to compromise on style.

"The autumn/winter (above and right) collection is very regal. It's 'granny chic' [self-consciously frumpy rather than unintentionally so], influenced by the New York catwalk. Lots



of tea dresses, lots of jersey material with check, lots of chiffon blouses, all with the traits of WheelieChix: easier openings, magnets for fastenings, trousers higher at the back and lower at the front and, where possible, front fastening."

Having listened to and acted on customer feedback, Louisa claims: "The autumn/winter collection is much better than before. We've taken on criticisms and suggestions

with more elasticity at the waist so we've concealed it with shirring."

Creating clothes for wheelchair-users is a challenge for designers and manufacturers, as Louisa found out at the sample stage. "I'd say, 'How on earth could you sit in that?' or, 'that's designed for a six-foot woman standing.' They had fixed ideas and there were a lot of arguments and stress to get things how I wanted them.

"There aren't any disabled designers and I needed people with pattern-cutting skills, but now that I'm gaining experience I might take over some of the designing myself and work with the manufacturer."

After meeting customers at Beyond Boundaries, Louisa has seen the value of off-line retail. "I'm approaching the big department stores to take on WheelieChix. Harrods says it sells everything from a pin to a diamond, so you never know."

WheelieChix traits are easier openings, magnets for fastenings, trousers higher at the back and lower at the front and, where possible, front fastening

from customers. Sizes only went up to a 16; now they go up to size 22. Others wanted longer dresses so now we have mid-calf skirts and dresses. And they wanted trousers

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localknowledge

Flamingos in the fens

A user-led arts group in Cambridge trains disabled performers and then hosts club nights at which their talents can shine, says **Kelly Mullan**

Combining hi-tech gadgetry and imaginative DIY, Funky Flamingo Club, a group of disabled adults and young people in Cambridge, runs arts projects providing entertainment for regular club nights.

Funky volunteer John Hutchison, who has Down's syndrome, explains the range of this home-grown club culture: "We have Pop Stars, VJs [video jammers], DJs, a band and Funky Flamingo TV. It's very creative."

The Funky Flamingo Club runs DJ and VJ training and offers the chance to perform live at club nights at The Junction in Cambridge. The Pop Stars project trains singers to sing along to backing tracks in preparation for entertaining club goers. And Funky Flamingo's band, Dream Catchers, writes and records material and performs at club nights.

But according to John Hutchison, it's not all glitz and glamour: "It's hard work. I work on admin, and researching funding, and finance; and before a club



Solo flight: Funky Flamingo's Chris Butler hits the skins

night there are lots of rehearsals and workshops."

A steering group of disabled adults and young people meets regularly to arrange everything from the music and entertainment at the club to decorations, publicity, tickets and merchandising.

Buoyed up by local

success, the club is going global via its internet TV station, Funky Flamingo TV (FFTV). Launched in

December 2007, FFTV has shown ten live broadcasts and provides a free on-demand service. Now FFTV is setting up web-links with New Zealand and the USA to connect Cambridge's disabled community to their global peers, giving artists an international platform to showcase work.

John says: "We've put a lot of work into Funky Flamingo TV. Now we want to get more people involved. My project is called Young Funky and it's for young people aged 11 to 16 to come along and see what they can do. I go to schools and do presentations and we do one-to-one work to see what the young people will like.

"The Funky Flamingo Club helps people achieve skills and goals. It's my job to take photos. It was a hobby at first but I'd like to do some marketing in the future and get my photos used in the local press.

"The best thing about the Funky Flamingo Club is getting to socialise in a comfortable way."

• **John Hutchison can be reached at Inspire on 01223 441106**

→ CONTACT US

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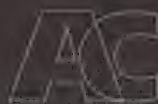
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A kind of magic

Ancient caravan routes, desert, sand dunes, medieval cities. Surely Morocco is one of the least accessible holiday destinations. Think again. Words and pictures by **Marion Bull**

The road from Marrakech comes to a halt at the oasis of M'hamid, after a two-day panoramic drive along the palm-lined Draâ Valley that meanders down to Zagora.

It's strange that after all the centuries of travellers passing through – the picturesque Draâ (pictured, above) is on the ancient caravan route from the Sahara to Marrakech – you still get a good audience. Halfway along the route, I'm invited into the crumbling, dark mud interior of a date farm for mint tea, surrounded by women in clashing, patterned Berber colours and henna'ed fingernails. The whole family – 11 children and a donkey – peer in from the white heat

of the doorway to have a look.

Mud villages line the river in a dust haze, the same colour as the earth. Ait Benhaddou, near Ouarzazate, is the most famous, a magnificent, fortified kasbah and the location for *Lawrence of Arabia* and 25 other movies.

Further south, some of the most inaccessible terrain on earth: 1,200 km of Saharan dunes. A painted sign at Zagora, en route to M'hamid, says, "Timbuctoo, 52 days". By camel, that is.

Nothing looks accessible – this is Africa, after all, and facilities for disabled holidaymakers have tended to reflect the poor facilities for disabled locals. With the exception of the Europeanised beach resort of Agadir on the Atlantic coast (the town was

rebuilt after an earthquake in the 60s), Morocco's medieval cities appear to be nothing but an impenetrable obstacle course.

Few people make it as far south as M'hamid, even fewer wheelchair-users. But here was Dominique Barbier from France, a "pioneer" for people with disabilities who want the adventure of sleeping under the desert sky.

After being left tetraplegic at the age of 18 in a motorbike accident, he set up Handivoyages, not as a tour operator, but offering free advice to travellers like himself. His first experience of Morocco, he said, "Blew my mind. I got a taste for adventure, and realised anything is possible. A few years ago I would never have



believed it possible to do a quarter of what I have done since. You have to break down the psychological barriers. Be open-minded, and don't give up as soon as something goes wrong."

He had travelled along the same route that I had with Cherg Voyages (English spoken) in their adapted vehicle. You might need to take a non-disabled companion, because the company cannot provide personal assistance. Cherg's director, Halim Sbaj, set up Le Petit Prince, an accessible campsite with facilities, four miles from M'hamid. But how can you negotiate dunes in a wheelchair?

"It's not a problem," says Dominique. "They roll out old carpets in front of us, and between the dunes baked mudflats are ideal to travel over."

For the less adventurous, you can spend a whole week exploring the

magical red city of Marrakech. It's near the airport, and shopping and sightseeing in the souks are all very close to the central hub, chaotic Djemaa El Fna square.

Anyone with sensory loss should take extra care crossing it. There are no traffic rules. Caleches (horse-drawn carriages) and bicycles weave back and forth in every direction. There are no pavements down the narrow alleyways that lead off it. Deaf people have to look behind frequently, and be constantly aware that mopeds may whizz close by, instead of getting a

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shock when they actually do.

It's at sunset when things really start to happen. The atmosphere is medieval street theatre with the snow-capped High Atlas mountains as a backdrop, just as they are ever-present on the route to the south. Kerosene lamps light up, swinging from orange juice stalls, a Berber fortune-teller adjusts her veil (no lipreading there), snake-charmers unwind their pets, a curl of smoke rises from an improvised barbecue, and the show begins. It's a Moroccan thing. Storytellers pull crowds of locals into tight circles. Tourists can only stand by amazed, but mostly amused, helplessly handing out dirhams (Moroccan currency) for every photo taken of street performers – musicians, dancers and swivel-headed water-carriers.

The various souks lead from the square, each specialising: jewellery, carpets, spices, babouches (leather slippers), fabrics, copper. Hagglng is vital. Expect to pay 30 – 50 per cent or less of the original price, and never let a young "guide" help or show to you a shop. They get their commission often while you are still in there.

For access, the souks have wide enough central alleyways. Interiors of shops can be narrow, or up steps in places, but most of the wares are on display outside. A man in a wheelchair was recently seen whizzing through the souks on *The Apprentice* on TV, and looked as though he knew where he was going. Getting lost is part of the experience, but ask a shopkeeper to help if you need to find the way back to the square. Look for the minaret of Koutoubia, the largest mosque in Marrakech, if all else fails.

There is no accessible public transport and no accessible public toilets. There are plenty of taxis on the edge of the Medina – the old fortified →

Before you make tracks...



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Top, carpets in a Marrakech souk. Top, right, pots in the beautiful blue Majorelle gardens. And the Djemaa El Fna square.



city – on the main road that leads to the modern Gueliz quarter, where you will find tourist police.

Moroccans are generally welcoming, kind, and hospitable, and attitudes, including in the government, towards disabled facilities are slowly changing. Recent high-profile events have put disability in the spotlight. In February, the French Supercinq Raid, a 48-hour integrated car rally, sped through the country in a cloud of dust, complete with 25 wheelchairs and 100 pairs of crutches clinging to roof-racks, in a show of solidarity with disabled Moroccans. Next year's sponsored integrated rally will help disadvantaged Moroccan children. Anyone with a driving companion can join for a registration fee.

With cheap flights, more visitors, and the French influence, Marrakech now has a range of accessible accommodation, from guest houses, such as the fully-adapted (including a medicalised bed) Handioasis, a new venture run by a paramedic and a nurse, four miles from town, with



Did you know?

Traditionally, leather was cured using urine and animal dung.

Did you know?

Goats grow on trees in Morocco. In the countryside where the argan tree grows, you can see goats balancing in the trees. They love the argan nut – it is poisonous to humans, but the oil is full of antioxidants. The tree is only found in Morocco, between Marrakech and Agadir.

an adapted vehicle for transfers and excursions, to more centrally-situated Riads – magnificent former merchants' houses, typified by a central courtyard and rooftop views.

The family-run accessible Riad Tarzout, away from the centre, has one fully-adapted room with chair shower, with the rest of the Riad renovated in accordance with the French Disability Association's recommendations. They also offer transfers and excursions in an adapted vehicle. The little Riad Jnane Mogador, conveniently two minutes from the square, offers ground-floor rooms that boast extra-wide doors (1.2m/4ft), but bathrooms are not adapted.

So it is possible to put together a trip independently, and if you live a long way from Heathrow or Gatwick and need to rest either side of the journey, the excellent new Yotel.com, right inside the two airports, has two fully accessible cabins rentable by the hour (the minimum booking is four hours).

After leaving the souks, I walked on to the beautiful blue Majorelle Gardens. It's the final resting place of former owner Yves St Laurent, in the Gueliz area. Chic Gueliz is a far cry from across the road in the Medina, never mind sleeping in the Sahara. The journey to the desert might be rough, but, as Dominique says, no-one who wants to experience its magic should be denied the opportunity. ■



Above, a Berber fortune-teller. Below, water-carriers, and a date farmer in the Draâ Valley



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If you have used our services before, you can still contact **Scope Response**, **DIAL UK**, or your local **DIAL UK independent member group** in the usual ways. For more information, please visit our websites:

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A Sideways slide to web action

The new Motorola Sidekick Slide is said to be ideal for deaf users.

Jamie Trounce tried it out

My first impression of the Motorola Sidekick Slide was that it looks like the Nokia N-Gage, or even a hand-held games console. It's designed to be held horizontally (landscape), rather than vertically (portrait), and it slides open to reveal a full QWERTY keyboard – hence the name.

It is a really well-built handset, and feels strong and solid in the hand, and the slider itself is strong without being overly resistant.

The keyboard buttons are small but not too small, while the main buttons are quite big and easy to use. The menus are navigated by use of a rolling "trackball", making it very accessible for

most people.

The phone contains many impressive features, such as a web browser, email, instant messaging, SMS, organiser, camera, and music player. Of course, it can be used to make phone calls, too! At first it is a little confusing to navigate through all of these features, but there are quick start instructions that help you to get used to it quickly.

The web browser in particular is very good, and because of the trackball is

much more accessible than some other handsets on the market. I was able to browse many websites, such as BBC, *Disability Now* and many more. I would probably say the browser is my favourite thing about the Sidekick.

The email is also impressive and very easy to set up, and is similar to the Blackberry.

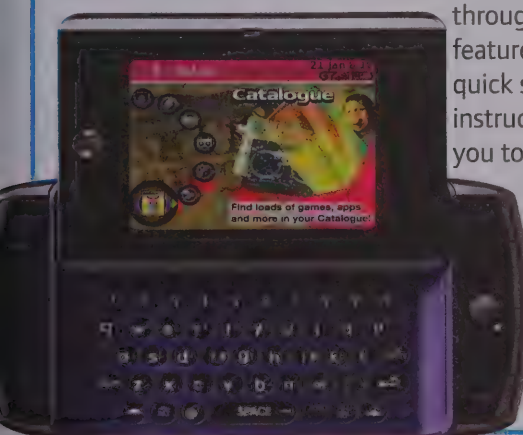
The "attention vibration" is great for deaf and hard-of-hearing people, as is the "strobe" mode, which uses coloured lights to alert you to calls or messages. The screen is large, about two

inches, which is a good size for a mobile and will be beneficial for those who find some displays too small.

However, the phone does have its drawbacks, in particular with the camera. The pictures are a bit dark and blurry in "normal" mode, and the night mode isn't much better. The controls are also a little complicated and the buttons are different from those that control the other features. It would also be good if it had a flash.

The battery life is average, but use it too much and the power can easily drain within a day. Make sure your Bluetooth is always switched off unless you are using it!

Personally, I think it is a good phone for hard-of-hearing and deaf people. I am deaf, and found it quite useful, especially the QWERTY keypad, though it would be even better if the handset was a little smaller and a little less chunky.



INFORMATION

The Motorola Sidekick Slide is available on contract exclusively on T-Mobile. It is free on some tariffs.

roadtest



JAMIE TROUNCE

Fuelling poverty



Petrol prices are spiralling but increases in disability benefits are lagging behind. That leaves disabled people who depend on their cars for their independence in deep trouble, says **Helen Smith**

At the time of writing, unleaded petrol prices had spiralled to an average of at least £1.15 a litre while diesel stood at around £1.30. This time last year both were less than 95p. Experts predict that by the end of 2008 we could be paying at least £1.50 for a litre of diesel.

It currently costs over £60 for me to fill my car with diesel. Not so long ago it was more like £40. Needless to say, disability benefits do not meet this extra cost and

some disabled people fear becoming housebound because they cannot afford to run their vehicle.

John Homer, from Chatham in Kent, wrote to me, saying: "I, like many other severely disabled people, have already made cut-backs on our daily needs because disability living allowance (DLA) is no longer able to meet that need. Before long, some of us will not be able to afford to run the vehicle that we need to extend our independence."

Disabled people often

have to buy larger vehicles to transport wheelchairs and scooters. People who drive with hand controls also have to have an automatic. Large automatic cars are about the worst for fuel consumption: for example, on *What Car?* website, a Vauxhall Corsa 1.3 CDTI has an average mpg of 62.8. If diesel is taken at £1.30 a litre, it costs £58.44 to fill and will take you 622 miles. A VW Caravelle 2.5 TDI, with an average 34 mpg, costs £104 to fill and will only take you 598 miles.

For many disabled people, using buses and trains is not viable: public transport may be inaccessible or run too infrequently. Often, the ability to remain mobile and independent depends solely on having a car.

The support organisation

Living Options Devon is deeply concerned that rising fuel prices could leave many disabled people "virtually housebound" and fears the negative impact on people's health.

The Department for Work and Pensions told me that DLA rises in line with the retail price index, which takes account of the increased cost of a range of goods, including fuel. DLA rose by 3.9 per cent this year and will rise again next April. "People receiving DLA," said a spokesman, "can use it in the way that best suits their needs."

But this isn't enough. Since last year, petrol prices

For many disabled people, the ability to remain mobile and independent depends solely on having a car

have risen by 21 per cent and diesel by 37 per cent. And for people on the Motability car scheme, all the mobility component of DLA goes to Motability and people who became disabled after they are 65 don't receive DLA anyway.

The government must act now before more disabled people find themselves with a car on the drive that they just can't afford to run.



Allied Vehicles' zero emission electric taxi has been snubbed by councillors in London and Liverpool. But TV presenter **Lara Masters** (below) gives it a gold star for access

I had mixed feelings when asked to review this new electric taxi, because in the last nine years I have developed an uncharacteristically venomous hatred of cabs. Since living in Willesden Green, north-west London, about five minutes from Notting Hill, I have never been able to get a taxi to collect me from home when using my Taxicard. Apparently, living in the suburbs is even more of a disability than using a wheelchair.

With professional stoicism, I refused to let my negative experiences cloud my judgement of the Allied Vehicles ZEV (Zero Emission Vehicle) E7, a conversion of the Peugeot Expert. This electric taxi doesn't look like a traditional black cab; it's larger, squarer and more spacious inside, like a people-carrier but with the usual seat formation and partition between driver and passengers.

The single ramp, which



pulls out from underneath the vehicle, is large and wide but mercifully easy to manoeuvre, and feels sturdy, so there is no need for 20 minutes of "a little bit left, a little bit right" while you wobble up two precariously-placed narrow ramps, fearing for your life and watching the taxi meter hurtle towards your allowance limit.

Once inside, there is enough room for a large wheelchair to turn to face the back and an impressive array of straps secures you firmly into place. If you are into bondage, this will be a highlight.

The journey itself was smooth and strangely silent without the melodious chugging of the diesel engine, and the extra height meant I didn't have to bend down and give myself another spinal injury to see out of the window.

The electric taxi produces no carbon dioxide emissions (black taxis are responsible for four per cent of the capital's total emissions) and is cheaper to run than a typical black cab (£530 per month for diesel versus £500 a month to charge the E7's lithium-ion batteries). A single charge of the battery

lasts 100 miles and the taxi has a top speed of 60mph. Of course, much as I love to know my taxi is cost-efficient and will help ensure our world won't be extinguished by a cloud of pollution, what I'm really interested in is that it's perfectly accessible!

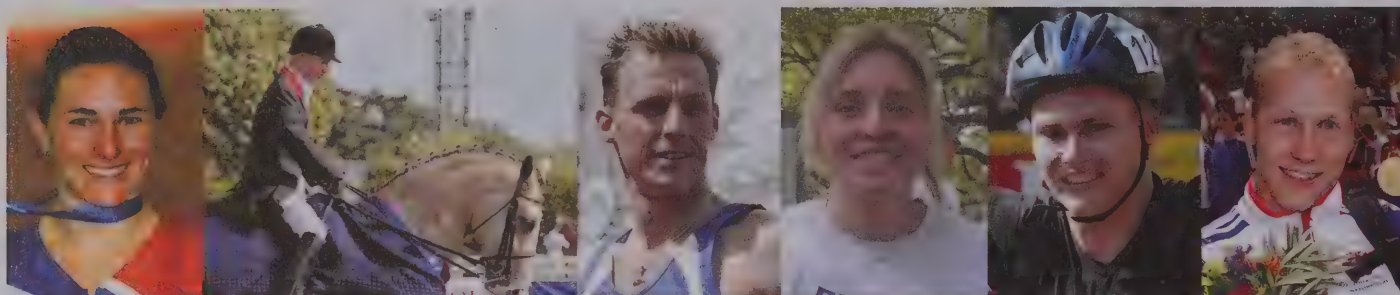
My excitement abated when I found that it doesn't look as if wheelchair-using Londoners or Liverpoolians will be able to use these revolutionary taxis any time soon.

Even though the same model in its diesel form is successfully in use in cities such as Edinburgh, Leeds, Newcastle and Birmingham, councils in London and Liverpool have raised objections to the E7 being included in their fleet because its "turning circle" is too big.

Personally, I am less worried that my cab can do a perfect pirouette than that it's an accessible vehicle that can get me from A to B. Time for an uprising.

sportnow

By Paul Carter



GB on target for Beijing glory

With the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing almost upon us, TeamGB is hoping to improve on the 94 medals brought back from Athens in 2004, when it finished second in the overall medals table behind this year's hosts, China.

UK Sport is expecting 95 medals this time, with 206 athletes competing in 18 sports, but China is widely tipped to improve on its haul in front of its own supporters, while strong performances are also expected from the USA, Canada, South Africa and Australia.

Despite GB's ambitious medal targets, the emphasis is strongly on development, as it looks towards London in 2012.

Mike Brace, president of ParalympicsGB, is aware of the threat of the Chinese squad. "As competitive standards rise and the dominant Chinese team takes the home advantage, our athletes will face some

TeamGB highlights

Some of our medal hopefuls with their classifications and the events they'll be contesting at the Beijing Paralympics, which will take place from 6 September to 17 September

ATHLETICS	Libby Clegg	T12	100m, 200m
	Ben Rushrove	T36	100m, 200m
	Ian Jones	T44	200m, 400m
	Danny Crates	T46	800m
	David Weir	T54	400m, 800m, 1500m, 5000m and Marathon
	Shelly Woods	T54	800m, 1500m, 5000m and Marathon
	Stephen Miller	F32	Club
	Kenny Churchill	F37	Javelin
CYCLING	Daniel Graves	F44	Discus
	Hollie Arnold	F46	Javelin
	Aileen McGlynn	B3	Tandem kilo, Tandem pursuit
	Daren Kenny	CP3	Team sprint, Kilo, Pursuit, Road race, Time trial
EQUESTRIAN	Sarah Storey	LC1	500m Time trial, Pursuit, Time trial
	Jody Cundy	LC2	Team sprint, Kilo
SHOOTING	Lee Pearson	1b	Dressage
SHOOTING	Di Coates	SH1B R2	10m Air rifle standing
SWIMMING	Jim Anderson	S2	50m, 100m and 200m Freestyle; 50m Backstroke
	Natalie Jones	S6	50m and 100m Freestyle; 50m Fly; 200m Individual medley
	David Roberts	S7	50m, 100m and 400m Freestyle
	Andrew Lindsay	S7	100m Backstroke
	David Roberts	S7	50m and 100m Freestyle
	Sam Hynd	S8	50m, 100m and 400m Freestyle; 100m Breaststroke; 200m Individual medley
	Sascha Kindred	SM6	200m Individual medley
TENNIS	Peter Norfolk		Quad Singles, Doubles

of their toughest obstacles yet at this summer's Games."

It's in the pool that Britain will again hope to bring home its biggest cache of medals. Our swimmers make up an impressive-looking squad, containing a host of Paralympic medal-winners and world record-holders alongside a clutch of promising youngsters.

Sascha Kindred, Andrew Lindsay and David Roberts are all going for hat-tricks, after winning successive gold medals in Sydney and Athens.

At the age of 45, Jim Anderson will be competing in his fifth Games, having won gold in four events in Athens.

Other names to watch out for are world record-holders Natalie Jones and Sam Hynd.

In athletics, wheelchair-racer David Weir looks set to claim his first Paralympic golds, having won silver and bronze in Athens. The four-time London marathon

Pictured opposite, left to right: Sarah Storey, Lee Pearson, Danny Crates, Shelly Woods, David Weir, Sascha Kindred

winner is currently the best wheelchair athlete in the world and has a strong chance of winning all five of his events.

TeamGB features four returning Paralympic athletics champions in Kenny Churchill, Danny Crates, Daniel Greaves and Stephen Miller, but the 2008 Games will be the first since 1984 not to feature

Tanni Grey Thompson, who retired in 2007.

The emphasis of the track and field squad is on youth, with seven juniors making their Paralympic debuts, the youngest being 14-year-old Hollie Arnold in the javelin.

World record-holder Ben Rushrove will hope for a strong performance in the sprints, as will rising stars Shelly Woods, Libby Clegg and Ian Jones, who will face South African Oscar Pistorius.

The men's wheelchair basketball team will aim to improve on its bronze from Athens. It has won silvers in

the European Championships and Paralympic World Cup since then but faces stiff competition in its pool from 2004 silver medalists Australia, USA, China, Brazil and Israel. Captain Simon Munn will be competing at his fifth successive Paralympics.

The women's team qualified by winning bronze at the European Championships but has been drawn alongside the Athens gold and silver medalists USA and Australia and World Championship bronze medalists Germany.

Britain's cycling hopes centre on former swimmers Sarah Storey (nee Bailey) and Jody Cundy, along with Darren Kenny and Aileen McGlynn. All four are world record-holders.

Big hopes in other sports include Lee Pearson in the dressage, who is hoping for a seventh Paralympic medal; shooting sensation Di Coates, who will be looking to make it eight medals from her seventh Games in the R2.10m air rifle (standing); and Peter Norfolk in the wheelchair tennis.



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artsreview



KATHARINE QUARMBY

A real page-turner

One publisher leads in accessible books for older children, says **Katharine Quarmby**

Ben Barclay, Christopher Schweich and Perran Thomas are all tremendously enthusiastic about being consultants on books for Barrington Stoke, the only UK publisher producing books which aim to meet a range of access needs. The three nine-year-old boys, from Abingdon House School, in west London, have all acted as expert readers on two books, *Dead Cooler*, and *Into the Storm*.

The three boys, all of whom have learning difficulties, like adventure stories. Christopher (pictured, right) describes *Dead Cooler* as "quite

funny – I like danger in books". Perran Thomas (left) describes *Into the Storm* as "quite a cool book, I wanted to turn the page" and Ben (centre) likes the ghost in *Dead Cooler*, saying: "The story was really exciting."

Their headteacher, Nick Rees, says the scheme is "amazing". "The main idea is to give children a sense of ownership about reading. Many books are just inaccessible for children with learning difficulties."

Barrington Stoke was started ten years ago by Patience Thomson, a headteacher who had worked with disabled children. Her

vision was to design books accessible for children with visual impairments, dyslexia and other learning difficulties – and she wanted the editorial process to involve disabled children. Barrington Stoke now has consultants throughout the UK. Katie Paice, Barrington Stoke's editorial manager, explains that all their books are published on off-white paper, which reduces glare for children with visual impairments. "Black print on white paper has a really strong glare and makes the letters jump around. We print on off-white or cream paper, which is a lot more expensive, but it does remove a

whole layer of problems for many children." The font, too, is designed for children with dyslexia, who often confuse "d" with "b". And the books are accessible to teenagers who may not be able to read longer words but do want a good, powerful story.

"Stories are important," says Paice, "part of our shared humanity." To that end, Barrington Stoke has signed up to the *In the Picture* campaign, run by Scope, to ensure that disabled children are represented in picture books and books with illustrations. Paice says: "Our readers include children who have visual or hearing impairments, so that is something we should reflect in our illustrations."

Kathy Saunders, a disabled book consultant who is on the steering committee of *In the Picture*, says Barrington Stoke's work is "commendable", and adds: "It is a significant advance on what publishers have done in the past... they are thinking about the social situation of older children... and getting that into text at a reading level that is appropriate, with the complications that dyslexia can create, is positive."

FESTIVALS

Surfing the comedy wave

Jim Mcsharry checks out six disability-related shows at this year's Edinburgh Fringe



Weights, by Lynn Manning, is the story of how one man's life is transformed by a gunshot to the head, in a gritty LA bar in 1978, causing blindness.

Manning could read a phone book aloud and make it sound like poetry! *Weights* is a skilfully-crafted blend of urban poetry, rap and performance.

Laurence Clark (above, right) uses PowerPoint to

genius effect in his new show *Spastic Fantastic*.

He sets himself the task of reclaiming the "S" word through the cunning use of charts and hidden camera gags about charities he invents to illustrate attitudes about disability and impairment. In the end, he doesn't reclaim the word, showing us instead the damage of disempowering language.

Laugh till you cry!

As she shows in *Liz Bentley-On-Sea*, Liz Bentley (left) understands the medium of poetry.

Her set, performed in a swimming pool, begins with a recorded monologue that sets the ground for the material to come.

What follows are clever little poems and songs about organics, crushes and the need for fêtes. In this wet world she has a style as dry as the Sahara.

Liz Carr starts with a barrage of jokes about the ironies of the disabled condition, the Make-A-Wish Foundation and carbon wheelprints, and her hates: Aussies, assisted suicide and the Beijing Paralympics.

Disneyland, swingers, past lives and fortune-tellers get a going-over before a confession about striptease classes.

The premise of Steve Day's gig is whether he should stay in the world of comedy or go. He assails us with family, social workers, Bebo and suicide, the mystery of different comedy gigs, IT liars and the art of doing nothing. Particularly funny and exposing are the



politics of the office tea monitor and an office sweepstake, as is a clever skit about his attempts to master the Wii game *Rock Star* to please his kids.

At the end of the gig, Steve calls for our vote: "Should I stay or go?" The audience roars its approval for him to stay.

In *Foreskin's Lament*, the story of an amateur rugby team in New Zealand in the 1970s, Larry, the locker-room physio (wheelchair-user Mark Beer), knows something stinks and it's not just changing-room sweat.

Amid team talks where hate is the key, morality shifts like quicksand. You know this philosophy will lead to injury and death. Not for the sensitive.

• For more on the Fringe, visit www.disabilitynow.org.uk

EXHIBITIONS

TOUCHING ART TOUCHING YOU

Get past the schmaltzy, Alan Partridge-like title and *Touching Art Touching You* offers a revolutionary experience of visual art.

Painting, sculpture, prints and installations from the BlindArt Permanent Collection are available for the public to gawp, grope, grasp and sniff at. The collection contains work from both blind and sighted artists, all chosen with multi-sensory experience in mind.



**Head, a textured print by
Liz Munro and Nuala Watt**

Former artist Harry Carter, who is visually-impaired, says: "It offers a completely new dimension of pleasure as the sense of touch is so varied. And the artist

touched it, so you get an empathy that you don't get from just looking."

Harry believes touch is an evocative way to experience art. His first touch tour was of the Barbara Hepworth sculptures at The Tate St Ives. "When I got to touch a bronze cast of Hepworth's hand it was emotional."

Bobbie Bownas was a painter until she lost her sight and took up sculpture.

"Touching paintings didn't do much for me but I could pick up the sculpture pieces and put my hand in them; that was excellent. I could

feel the slippiness of the porcelain and something added to make it furry to the touch."

Being allowed to touch art works is an exhilarating freedom. I was immersed in this new way of exploring a gallery and there is certainly an added frisson from pleasures verboten, as Max Mosley would no doubt testify.

• *Touching Art Touching You*, Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro, until 4 October
• For a longer review, visit www.disabilitynow.org.uk
Kelly Mullan

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Sussex Health Care



Sussex Health Care is an award winning group of care homes that were founded in 1985. Sussex Health Care now operate 15 care homes, predominantly in the West Sussex area, providing nearly 550 beds, incorporating specialist care provision as well as care for older people.

In 2008 the group are developing 2 new purpose built facilities

Beechcroft Care Centre, West Hoathly Road, East Grinstead
and

Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead

Beechcroft Care Centre, which opened in May 2008, is in East Grinstead and caters for ten young people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. Person-centered planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service users' needs and wishes at the centre of our service.



This care home provides specialist nursing care and is equipped with the latest technology aids to provide a safe, comfortable, homely environment for our service users. **Beechcroft Care Centre** is a specialist care home with ten places for people with learning and/or physical disabilities.

It offers superb purpose-built facilities with track hoisting throughout. Each single room is provided with en suite facilities. A swimming pool and spa pool are available to all service users along with sensory and physiotherapy rooms.



Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead

This service is due to open in August 2008. It will provide a purpose built residential service with 24 hour nursing support for people with acquired brain injury and neurological conditions.

Sussex Health Care operates the following award winning care homes:

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BEECH LODGE (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) Broadbridge Heath, Horsham 01403 791725
CLEMSFOLD HOUSE (EMI) Broadbridge Heath, Horsham 01403 790312
FOREST LODGE (EMI) Nutley, Nr Uckfield 01825 712514
HORNCastle HOUSE (Adult Care) Sharpthorne 01342 810219
KINGSMEAD CARE CENTRE (Adult Care & Physically Disabled) Horsham 01403 265335
KINGSMEAD LODGE (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) Horsham 01403 211790
LONGFIELD MANOR (Adult Care) Billingshurst 01403 786832
NORFOLK LODGE (Learning Difficulties) Horsham 01403 218879
ORCHARD LODGE (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) Warnham 01403 242278
RAPKYNS CARE HOME (Adult Care) Broadbridge Heath, Horsham 01403 265096
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UPPER MEAD (Adult Care & Medical Conditions) Henfield 01273 492870
WHITE LODGE (Learning Difficulties) Purley, Croydon 020 8763 2586
WISTERIA LODGE (Physically Disabled & Learning Difficulties) Nutley, Nr. Uckfield 01825 714080

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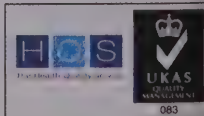
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

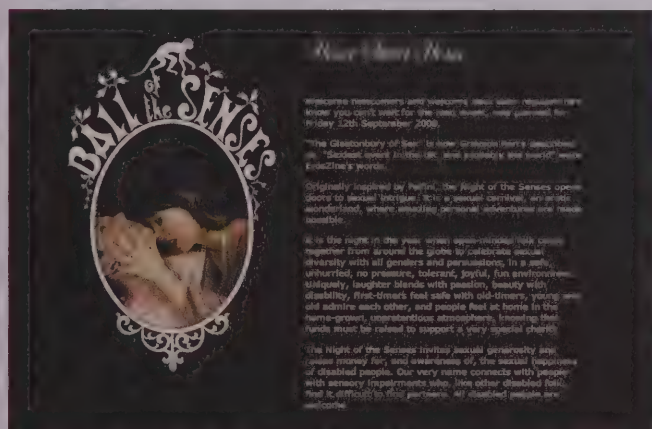


webwatch

Brains, bikes and bodies



Motorsport journalist **Chris Dabbs** spends many of his web hours surfing sites that defend motorists from over-zealous policing. But he still has time to check out developments in cannabis drugs, the US election and the odd sexual carnival



A big-brained web guru once told me that the more precise your interest, the better the web is at delivering the answer.

Well, apart from my sad obsession with P51D Mustangs and the Battle of Britain (I know, I know), the web has helped me out in the real world with a couple of sites dedicated to helping the beleaguered road-user.

If you are unlucky enough to fall foul of a speed camera, **www.ppipoo.com** is a brilliant resource for information on how to challenge those pesky tickets.

It has a really active forum full of more of those

big brains.

You can also pop over to **www.speedaholics.com** for the guerrilla end of the anti-speed camera movement.

Run by the mysterious Captain Gatso, who gained notoriety for despatching several cameras, the site is a tad more responsible these days with a mission to see more traffic cops on our roads and to stop "the government treating motorists like their favourite whipping boy".

To get up to speed on any four-wheeler stuff that the mainstream media glosses over, **www.petrolheads.com** is well worth a look. If you want an irreverent peek at

motorworld and all the hype and spin put out by the car industry, then **sniffpetrol.com**, which is put together by a producer from *Top Gear* magazine, will bring a smile to your face – if you can live with the barrack-room humour.

For my sins, I do some work on **www.motorcyclenews.com**. It's a big site with something for everyone into bikes and especially bikesport and the reporters are really well-connected in the MotoGP and World Superbike paddocks.

At the end of the day, you can't beat having guys talking face-to-face to turn the gossip that the web is so good at into accurate news.

With a spinal injury to deal with for 15 years, I long ago found that cannabis lessens the pain and spasm, but self-medicating via a criminal network is not for me.

However, I came across **www.gwpharm.com**, the

site for the company that has developed the cannabis-based drug Sativex. After a visit to my sympathetic doctor, my regular prescription now contains Sativex, which has really helped my day-to-day living (although I've put a few pounds on with chocolate frenzies).

I'm wary of the blogosphere and its thousands of self-absorbed accounts but with all the events over the Pond in election year, **http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com** delivers a thoughtful and libertarian view from the US that is a healthy antidote to some of our liberal media's output.

Still with my libertarian hat on (and not much else), I'd like to point you towards **www.nightofthesenses.com** (left) which promotes a sexual carnival, where open-minded folk come together from around the globe to celebrate sexual diversity and raise money for Outsiders, **www.outsiders.org.uk**, a self-help group for people with physical and social disabilities. See you there!

→ Have your say

- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk
- phone us 020 7619 7323

worklife

Kim gets physical

Kim Dean was told she was too small to be a physiotherapist. But, she says, that only made her more determined



UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

After having surgery to correct the painful bowing of my legs at age 13, I received months of physiotherapy to get me back on my feet and walking again. In hospital, I hated physio sessions. I felt like they didn't understand me or my physical capabilities. When I got home, I dreaded the thought of yet more

physiotherapy, but my physio at home was lovely: she adapted exercises and techniques, and although it was still hard work, I felt like I could do things again. This really boosted my self-esteem. From that point on, I've wanted to be a physiotherapist, and help people as my physio helped me.

At the age of 16, I was asked by a GP what I

wanted to do when I was older. I told him: "I'm going to be a physiotherapist," to which his reply was: "Why don't you look at podiatry? It's only feet. You'd manage that. Physiotherapy is too physical for you." His opinion only made me more determined to prove him, and others who expressed similar views through my teens, wrong.

At college, I took the A-levels required for the course and was on target for the grades needed. As I began looking around universities, it became apparent that these negative views were shared by one or two physiotherapists. However, the majority were supportive of my career choice, encouraging me to pursue it.

I have just finished my studies at the University of Salford, gaining a 2:1. Since the open day at Salford, I have had nothing but support and positivity. The physio course had never had a dwarf student before and staff were unaware of any previous dwarf undergraduate physios, but

were sure that with some minor adjustments I could complete the course and attain my state registration. I have done that now and as far as we are aware I am the first dwarf physiotherapist in the UK.

I have really enjoyed my training, especially the clinical parts. A highlight was the opportunity during two of my placements to work alongside the physio who had inspired me after my operation.

I am currently hunting for my first job and looking forward to beginning my career. I am thrilled that I have made it and proved wrong those who dissuaded me because of my size.

I am thankful that we live in a society where barriers between opportunities and disability are falling fast. Along with many others, my experiences prove that you can do anything that you set your mind to. It might take some thought and adaptation, but you can get there in the end.

KIM DEAN: CAREER PATH

- 2005: Left Aquinas College, Stockport, with three A-levels
- 2005: Started a degree in physiotherapy at the University of Salford
- 2008: Graduated from the University of Salford with a 2:1

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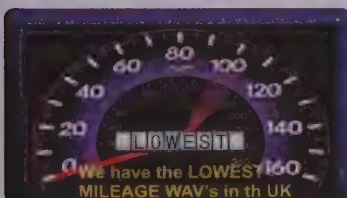
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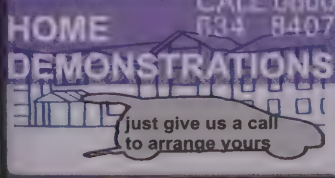


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2003(03)	Renault Kangoo 1.2 Authentique 5sp, red, 3 seats, 9,000 mls	£6,195
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2005(55)	Fiat Doblo 1.9JTD Dynamic 5sp, silver, 5 seats, 11,000 mls	£8,295
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2007(07)	Peugeot Partner 1.4 Combi 5sp, silver, 5 seats, 900 mls	£10,695
2007(07)	Renault Kangoo 1.2 Authentique 5sp, blue, 3 seats, 600 mls	£10,895
2006(56)	Renault Kangoo 1.5D Expression 5sp, silver, 3 seats, 7,000 mls	£10,895
2008(57)	Renault Kangoo 1.6 Authentique auto, silver, 3 seats, 600 mls	£10,895
2008(08)	Renault Kangoo 1.2 Authentique, blue, 3 seats, 200 mls	£10,895
2008(08)	Peugeot Partner 1.4 Combi 5sp, red, 5 seats, 1,000 mls	£11,295
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2002(52)	SEAT Alhambra 2.0S 6sp, grey, 5seats, 30,000 mls	£11,995
2005(05)	Volkswagen T5 1.9D, 5sp, green, 5 seats, 42,000	£12,995
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2005(05)	Volkswagen T5 1.9D, 5sp, blue, 5 seats, 38,000 mls	£13,995
2005(05)	Kia Sedona 2.9D LE 5sp, silver, 4 seats, 22,000 mls	£14,495
2004(54)	Mercedes Vaneo 1.6 Trend auto, red, 4 seats, blue, 47,000 mls	£14,495
2004(54)	SEAT Alhambra 2.0S 6sp, blue, 5 seats, 39,000 mls	£14,995
2006(06)	Kia Sedona 2.9D LE auto, grey, 4 seats, 19,000 mls	£14,995
2004(04)	Mercedes Vaneo 1.6 Family auto, red, 4 seats, 23,000 mls	£15,495
2008(57)	Volkswagen Shuttle 1.9D 5sp, blue, 5 seats, 2,000 mls	£16,995
2007(07)	Kia Sedona 2.9D LS auto, blue, 5 seats, 9,000 mls	£19,495
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2001(51)	Renault Master 2.2D SL28 5sp, blue, 4 seats, 29,000 mls	£8,995
2004(54)	Citroen Dispatch 1.9D 5sp, navy, 4 seats, 49,000 mls	£8,995
2007(07)	Citroen Dispatch 1.9D 5sp, red, 4 seats, 2,000 mls	£13,995
2005(05)	Renault Master 2.5D 5sp, silver, 5 seats, 21,000 mls	£14,995
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To apply, please visit www.hillingdon.gov.uk/jobs and search using the reference number.



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Fax: 020 7619 7331, Minicom: 020 7619 7332, email: patrick.durhammatthews@disabilitynow.org.uk

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FORD FOCUS ZETEC 1.6, 2001, Auto, 1 owner from new, FSH with Ford dealer, air con, last service and MOT May 2008, 6 months' tax. Carchair Conversion for front passenger by Constables. 63,000 miles, in excellent condition, £4,000 ono. Tel: **01424 422320** (Hastings) or mobile **07546 100383**.

RENAULT KANGOO

EXPRESSION 1.6, metallic blue, auto, e/windows, e/mirrors, air con, central locking, CD player. Allied Vehicles wheelchair conversion incl rear ramp with 4 point wheelchair harness and electric winch. Carries 4 including wheelchair or 5 without. Registered July 2005 (05 plate), 12 months' MOT, 2 owners from new with fsh, only 21k miles. In immaculate condition, £7,500 ono. Tel: **07973 633135** (Princes Risborough, Bucks).

FORD FOCUS ZETEC 1.6 auto, registered 2000, silver metallic. MOT til February 2009. Constables Carchair Conversion for front passenger. Good condition, only 22,000 miles £5,500 ono. Tel: **01949 81633** (Nottingham) or email: gfarries@thomaslegal.co.uk

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RENAULT CLIO 1.2 manual, registered 2001, petrol, red, extra light power-steering, sunroof, immobiliser, twin airbags, central locking, 51k miles, 5 seats, MOT to Jan 09, road tax to June 09, very good condition. £3,000. Tel: **01480381450** (Cambridgeshire) or mobile: **07837 746 896**.

MERCEDES VITO 108, diesel, racing green, R reg (1998), 138k miles, e/windows, pas, CD player, air con, central locking, brand new clutch, MOT until Jan 09. Widnes Car Centre Conversion incl rear manual spring loaded ramp, carries 6 including wheelchair. Only one owner from new, fsh, £3,500 ono. Tel: **01923 228670** (Watford) or mobile: **07790 11477**.

MERCEDES V220 Cdi Fashion, light metallic blue, auto, 98k miles, air con, lightened pas, electric rear and front windows, e/mirrors, cruise control, twin sunroofs, alloy wheels. With wheelchair conversion incl AHF electric side lift with remote control and Alfred Bekker hand controls. Adaptable for wheelchair user or non-disabled driver. MOT expires Feb 09, 6 months' tax. Carries 6 including wheelchair user. In excellent condition, fsh, £7,200 ono. Tel: **01366 328047** (Kings Lynn) or email: hernandezsusan@hotmail.com

Cont'd see pg 76

TENDER

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RESEARCH PROJECT

Research Project to ascertain the important factors that contribute to a successful and effective working relationship between the Personal Assistant (PA) and the PA Employer.

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The first stage will be carried out through taking part in regional focus groups in different areas of England (possibly Sheffield, Greenwich and Peterborough). Further data will be collected through email questionnaires; telephone interviews and face to face interviews.

If you are interested in any areas of this research then contact Reshma Patel either by email **paresearch@hotmail.co.uk** or call **07787547466**.

Reasonable expenses will be paid with prior approval.

This research is supported by Skills for Care to inform future workforce development and to ensure small employers are included in future planning.

Should we be oversubscribed we will have to select a sample of people for the first stage based on gender; ethnicity; sexual orientation; cultural and religious differences impairment; and experience to ensure we have diverse perspectives.



RECRUITMENT

Action on Disability and Development (ADD) is an international development agency working with organisations of disabled people in their struggle for the rightful inclusion of disabled adults and children in society. Established in 1985, ADD operates internationally with partner organisations of disabled people to create a world where all disabled people are enabled to enjoy their rights, fulfil their responsibilities and participate as fully as they can and choose at every level of society.



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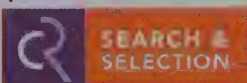
ADD is committed to championing the human rights of disabled people. We are equally committed to recruiting a disabled person for this key role. Only disabled applicants should, therefore, apply.

This is an exciting and unique opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of disabled people. We want to appoint a disabled person to lead ADD into the next phase of its development. Responsible for circa 200 staff and working across 12 countries, you will lead ADD to help develop the capacity of disabled people and their organisations, and work with them to influence policies at local, regional and national level. You will cultivate key stakeholder relationships (particularly with the disability movement and donors), promote ADD in international arenas, and develop income through existing and new funding streams.

You will need:

- A commitment to the social model of disability, with a deep understanding of the discrimination and human rights deprivation that many disabled people face
- Strategic leadership experience and management skills gained in disability rights/international development/non-profit arena
- Understanding and experience of capacity-building approaches to develop and implement programmes that improve disabled people's quality of life
- Demonstrable financial acumen to oversee ADD's financial strategy
- Strong communication and relational skills in cross-cultural contexts

For more information about ADD and this unique opportunity please visit www.add.org.uk For an application pack please visit www.crsearchandselection.com/add or e-mail Alex Ouezani at alex@crsearchandselection.com



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For more information on the work of the NMC, visit www.nmc-uk.org

Please note these posts will be offered subject to confirmation following Parliamentary approval, decisions on which are anticipated Autumn 2008. New council members will be expected to take up post from 1 January 2009.

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The Appointments Commission is committed to equality of opportunity for all and the principle of appointment based on merit following an open and transparent process and independent assessment. An interview access scheme is available for disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria for appointment. Please note this is a public appointment, not employment.

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Nursing & Midwifery
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TRADE

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FIAT DOBLO ACTIVE 1.4, blue,

under 2k miles with wheelchair conversion incl ramp and electric hoist. Only 2 owners from new with fsh. Carries 4 including wheelchair, registered June 06, still under warranty. Cost £9,250 a year ago, asking £7,500. Tel: **07973 234307** (W. London) or email: **rockhart2001@hotmail.com**

02/52 RENAULT KANGOO

Authentique, 1.2 16v in green, Aspect Conversion, 3 Seater, lowered floor, 37k miles, 12 months' MOT. £6,750. Tel Mervyn Powell: **01970 624444** (Anthony Motors Ltd, Aberystwyth) or email: **47901@connect-system.com**

TRADE

PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS



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The Mayor of London invites you to apply for the position of Non-Executive Board Member on the London Skills and Employment Board. The Board, which has majority business membership, has statutory responsibility for developing a Skills and Employment strategy for London to keep London's economy competitive and address the inequalities in London's labour market. The Board's responsibilities also include steering over £600 million of public funding for adult skills.

The Board influences the actions of skills and employment funding and delivery organisations across the capital, including the London Learning and Skills Council, the London Development Agency, Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and London employers. You will work closely with the Mayor and with Government Ministers and officials.

You will be expected to demonstrate an interest in, and knowledge of, the skills and employment issues facing London. We are looking for people who have substantial and successful business, public sector or voluntary sector experience in a senior leadership role, who can apply their vision and judgement to making change happen for the benefit of London. You must have a passion for improving the life chances of workless Londoners, including young adults, and a determination to drive implementation of the Board's strategy.

It is the intention that the Board should reflect London's diversity.

For application details and further information on the role, please visit our website

www.london.gov.uk/jobs.jsp or call GLA's recruitment team, on 020 7983 4230 (text phone 4159) quoting reference LSEB08.

Closing date for receipt of completed applications:
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www.london.gov.uk/lseb

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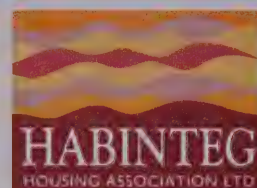
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For further information and an application pack, please contact:

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57 Fiat Doblo Aspen 1.4 (J8108), 4 seats, 4,900 miles, Lowered rear lift, **£10,750**

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I'll pitch a tent on a roundabout

Flat hunting is no fun when you're bone idle, says **Paul Carter**. Maybe it's time to look for office accommodation

I'm a little distracted. Unfortunately, I'm in the middle of that most delightful of social chores: flat hunting.

Trying to find somewhere to live in London is not enjoyable at the best of times, but when you have to factor in finding somewhere that's accessible to the likes of me, it becomes as appealing as an Ann Summers party at Max Mosley's house.

Needless to say, because of this, bone-idle-itis has got the better of me, and now I'm starting to panic. There isn't much time left before I get booted out, and I don't think I would cope well with the streets.

Having said that, I was always taken by the story of a Wolverhampton man who lived on a roundabout on the ring road for 30 years and became a local icon.

I quite like the idea of that – people could call me the Littlest Hobo and I could live on a traffic island. Or a mini-roundabout. I could have my own theme tune and the locals could shower me with gifts as I selflessly spent my time solving their mundane life predicaments.



Or maybe not.

We've actually had a bit of a reshuffle here at Disability Now Towers, and it got me thinking that maybe I should knock on the head the idea of finding somewhere new and

“People could call me the Littlest Hobo and I could live on a traffic island or a mini-roundabout”

accessible to live, and just move into the office. I seem to spend half my life here anyway...

It's not exactly paradise. In fact, it's more Peter

Shilton than Paris Hilton, but it has half-decent facilities, and being somewhere with lots of disabled people in it, it's quite good access-wise.

There's no washing machine, but there's a dishwasher in the kitchen, and if it cleans plates I don't see why it couldn't handle the odd pair of pants as well.

It would pose a couple of logistical problems, though. What would happen when I took time off? I don't think my estimable colleagues would enjoy coming into work first thing in the morning to find me wrapped in a duvet playing Sonic the

Hedgehog, surrounded by the previous night's detritus.

Also, the cleaner might never recover from the shock of finding a sole artificial leg poking out from under a desk (I used to do that to the infant school kids when I was younger. Hours of fun, and no doubt many more hours of therapy when they were older).

In the meantime, I'll keep scouring the property pages, searching for the perfect bachelor pad that doesn't look like it was designed for an NBA basketball team.

I don't fancy my chances. See you on the roundabout.



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